

THE THREE AGES OF THE INTERIOR LIFE

PRELUDE OF ETERNAL LIFE
ILLUSTRATED

REVEREND REGINALD
GARRIGOU-LAGRANGE O.P.



TRANSLATED BY
SISTER M. TIMOTHEA DOYLE



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Reverend Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange O.P. was professor of Dogma and Mystical Theology in the Angelico, Rome.

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THE THREE AGES OF THE INTERIOR LIFE: PRELUDE OF ETERNAL LIFE

Preface

This work represents the summary of a course in ascetical and mystical theology which we have been giving for twenty years at the Angelicum in Rome. In this book we take up in a simpler and higher manner the study of the same subjects that we treated in two other works: *Christian Perfection and Contemplation* and *L'amour de Dieu et la croix de Jesus*. Complying with a request, we offer in this volume our preceding research in the form of a synthesis, in which the different parts mutually balance and illuminate each other. In accordance with advice from various groups, we have eliminated from this exposition discussions to which it is no longer necessary to return. The book thus conceived is accessible to all interior souls.

We have not given this study the form of a manual because we are not seeking to accumulate knowledge, as is too often done in academic overloading, but to form the mind, to give it the firmness of principles and the suppleness required for the variety of their applications, in order that it may thus be capable of judging the problems which may arise. The humanities were formerly conceived in this fashion, whereas often today minds are transformed into manuals, into repertories, or even into collections of opinions and of formulas, whose reasons and profound consequences they do not seek to know.

Moreover, questions of spirituality, because they are most vital and at times most hidden, do not easily fall into the framework of a manual; or to put the matter more clearly, great risk is run of being superficial in materially classifying things and in substituting an artificial mechanism for the profound dynamism of the life of grace, of the infused virtues, and of the gifts. This explains why the great spiritual writers have not set forth their thought under this schematic form, which risks giving us a skeleton where we seek for life.

In these questions we have followed particularly three doctors of the Church who have treated these matters, each from his own point of view: St. Thomas, St. John of the Cross, and St. Francis de Sales. In the light of the theological principles of St. Thomas, we have tried to grasp what is most traditional in the mystical doctrine of *The Dark Night* by St. John of the Cross and in the *Treatise on the Love of God* by St. Francis de Sales.

We have thus found a confirmation of what we believe to be the truth about the infused contemplation of the mysteries of faith, which seems to us more and more to be in the normal way of sanctity and to be morally necessary to the full perfection of Christian life. In certain advanced souls, this infused contemplation does not yet appear as a habitual state, but from time to time as a transitory act, which in the interval remains more or less latent, although it throws its light on their entire life. However, if these souls are generous, docile to the Holy Ghost, faithful to prayer and to continual interior recollection, their faith becomes increasingly contemplative, penetrating, and full of savor, and it directs their action while making it ever more fruitful. In this sense, we maintain and we explain what seems to us the traditional teaching, which is more and more accepted today: namely, that the normal prelude of the vision of heaven, the infused contemplation of the mysteries of faith, is, by docility to the Holy Ghost, prayer, and the cross, accessible to all fervent interior souls.

We believe also that, according to the doctrine of the greatest spiritual writers, notably of St. John of the Cross, there is a degree of perfection that is not obtained without the passive purifications, properly so called, which are a mystical state. This seems to us clearly indicated by all the teaching of St. John of the Cross on these passive purifications, and in particular by these two texts of capital importance from *The Dark Night*: "The night of sense is common, and the lot of many: these are the beginners"; "In the blessed night of the purgation of sense, the soul began to set out on the way of the spirit, the way of beginners and proficients, which is also called the illuminative way, or the way of infused contemplation, wherein God Himself teaches and refreshes the soul without meditation or any active efforts that itself may deliberately make."¹

We have never said, moreover, as some have asserted we did, that "the state of infused contemplation, properly so called, is the only normal way to reach the perfection of charity." This infused contemplation, in fact, generally begins only with the passive purification of the senses, or, according to St. John of the Cross, at the beginning of the full illuminative way such as he describes it. Many souls are, therefore, in the normal way of sanctity before receiving infused contemplation, properly so called; but this contemplation, we say, is in the normal way of sanctity, at the summit of this way.

Without fully agreeing with us, a contemporary theologian, who is a professor of ascetical and mystical theology in the Gregorian University, wrote about our book, *Christian Perfection and Contemplation*, and that of Father Joret, O.P., *La contemplation mystique d'après saint Thomas d'Aquin*: "No one could seriously dispute the fact that this doctrine is remarkably constructed and superbly arrived at; that it sets forth with beautiful lucidity the spiritual riches of Dominican theology in the definitive form given to it in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries by the great interpreters of St. Thomas, namely, Cajetan, Banez, and John of St. Thomas; that the synthesis thus presented groups in a strong and harmonious unity a considerable mass of teaching and experience of Catholic spiritual tradition; and that it allows the full value of many of the most beautiful pages of our great contemplatives to be brought out."²

The author of these lines adds that everything in this synthesis is not of equal value and does not have the same authority. It is

certain that after the truths of faith and the commonly received theological conclusions, which represent what is surest in the sum of theological science, what we put forward on the authority of St. Thomas and of his best commentators does not command our adherence to the same extent as the principles which are its foundation. Yet it is difficult to subtract from this synthesis a single important element without compromising its solidity and harmony.

Has not a notable harmony already been realized when we consider that the most attentive critics recognize the admirable construction and superb growth of a doctrine?

The Carmelite Congress held at Madrid in 1923, the conclusions of which were published in the review, *El Monte Carmela* (Burgos), May, 1923, recognized the truth of these two important points on the subject of infused contemplation (Theme V): "The state of contemplation is characterized by the growing predominance of the gifts of the Holy Ghost and by the superhuman mode with which all good actions are performed. As the virtues find their ultimate perfection in the gifts, and as the gifts find their perfect actualization in contemplation, it follows that contemplation is the ordinary 'way' of sanctity and of habitually heroic virtue."

In his *Precis de theologie ascetique et mystique* (1928), Father Tanquerey, the Sulpician, joins also in this teaching, to the extent that he writes:

"When infused contemplation is considered independently of the extraordinary mystical phenomena that sometimes accompany it, it is not something miraculous or abnormal, but the result of two causes: the growth of our supernatural organism, especially of the gifts of the Holy Ghost, and of an operating grace which is itself in no way miraculous.... This doctrine seems clearly to be the traditional doctrine such as it is found in the works of mystical authors, from Clement of Alexandria to St. Francis de Sales.... Almost all these authors treat contemplation as the normal crowning of Christian life.³

"With the same meaning we can quote what St. Ignatius of Loyola says in a well-known letter to St. Francis Borgia. (Rome, 1548): "Without these gifts (divine impressions and illuminations), all our thoughts, words, and works are imperfect, cold, and troubled. We ought to desire these gifts that by them our works may become just, ardent, and clear for the greater service of God." In 1924, Father Peeters, S.J., in chapter 8 of his interesting study, *Vers l'union divine par les exercices de saint Ignace* (Museum Lessianum, Bruges), wrote: "What does the author of the Exercises think of the universal vocation to the mystical state? It is impossible to admit that he considers it a quasi-abnormal exception.... His optimistic confidence in the divine liberality is known. "Few men," said the saint, "suspect what God would make them if they placed no obstacle to His work" Such, in truth, is human weakness that only a singularly generous elite accepts the formidable exigencies of grace. Heroism never was and never will be banal, and sanctity cannot be conceived without heroism....

"In the entire book of the Exercises, with an insistence revealing his deep conviction, he offers to his generous disciples the unlimited hope of the divine communications, the possibility of attaining God, of tasting the sweetness of the divinity, of entering into immediate communication with God, of aspiring to the divine familiarity. He said: "The more the soul attaches itself to God and shows itself generous toward Him, the more apt it becomes to receive graces and spiritual gifts in abundance."...

"This is putting it still too mildly. The graces of prayer seem to him not only desirable, but hypothetically necessary to eminent sanctity, especially in apostolic men.⁴

This is what we wished to show in the present work. Agreement on these great questions is increasingly acknowledged, and is also more real than it seems. Some, who are professional theologians as we ourselves are, consider the life of grace, the seed of glory, in itself in order to judge what ought to be the full, normal development of the infused virtues and of the gifts, the proximate disposition for receiving the beatific vision without passing through purgatory; in other words, their full development in a completely purified soul that has profited richly by the trials of life on earth and no longer has to expiate its faults after death. Whence we conclude that infused contemplation is, in principle or in theory, in the normal way of sanctity, although there are exceptions arising from the individual temperament or from absorbing occupations or from less favorable surroundings, and so on.⁵

Other authors, considering especially the facts, or the individual souls in which the life of grace exists, declare there are truly generous interior souls that do not reach this summit, which is, nevertheless, in itself the full, normal development of habitual grace, of the infused virtues, and of the gifts.

Spiritual theology, like every science, ought to consider the interior life as such, and not in a given individual in the midst of rather unfavorable given circumstances. Because there are stunted oaks, it does not follow that the oak is not a tall tree. Spiritual theology, while noting the exceptions that may arise from the absence of a given condition, ought especially to establish the higher laws of the full development of the life of grace as such, and the proximate disposition to receive the beatific vision immediately in a fully purified soul.

Purgatory, being a punishment, presupposes a fault that we could have avoided and that we could have expiated before death by accepting the trials of the present life with an ever better will. We are seeking here to determine the normal way of sanctity or of a perfection such that one could enter heaven immediately after death. From this point of view, we must consider the life

of grace inasmuch as it is the seed of eternal life, and consequently it is the correct idea of eternal life, the end of our course, which must illuminate the entire road to be traveled. Movement is not specified by its point of departure or by the obstacles it encounters, but by the end toward which it tends. Thus the life of grace must be defined by eternal life of which it is the seed; and then the proximate and perfect disposition to receive the beatific vision immediately is in the normal way of sanctity.

In the following pages we insist far more on the principles generally accepted in theology, by showing their value and their radiation, than on the variety of opinions on one particular point or another proposed by often quite secondary authors. There are some recent works, already indicated, which mention all these opinions in detail. We propose another aim, and that is why we quote mostly from the greatest masters. Constant recourse to the foundations of their doctrine seems to us what is most necessary for the formation of the mind, which is more important than erudition. The secondary ought not make us forget the primary, and the complexity of certain questions ought not to make us lose sight of the certitude of the great directive principles that illuminate all spirituality. We ought particularly not to be content with repeating these principles like I so many platitudes, but to scrutinize them, to probe their depths, and to revert to them continually that we may better understand I them.

Doubtless such a course of action lays one open to repetition; but those who seek true theological science over and above contingent opinions which may be in vogue for several years, know that it is above all wisdom. They know that it is not so much preoccupied with deducing new conclusions, but with connecting all the more or less numerous conclusions with the same higher principles, like the different sides of a pyramid with the same apex. Then the fact that in relation to every problem we recall the loftiest principle of the synthesis is not a repetition but a way of drawing near to circular contemplation, which, St. Thomas says,⁶ ever reverts to the same eminent truth the better to grasp all its potentialities, and which, like the flight of a bird, describes several times the same circle around the same point. This center, like the apex of a pyramid, is in its way a symbol of the single instant of immobile eternity, which corresponds to all the successive instants of time that passes. From this point of view, our readers will pardon us for repeating several times the same dominant themes which constitute the charm, the unity, and the grandeur of spiritual theology.

Translator's Preface

This translation of Father Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange's synthesis of the spiritual life, *Les Trois Ages de la Vie Interieure*, has been made possible by the interest and encouragement of Mother Mary Samuel, O.P., Mother General of the Sinsinawa Dominican Sisters.

Gratitude is due especially to the Very Reverend Peter O'Brien, O.P., S.T.Lr., Ph.D., Provincial of the Province of St. Albert the Great, River Forest, Illinois, for reading the manuscript, to other Fathers of the Dominican House of Studies in River Forest for criticisms and helpful suggestions, and to Sister Mary Aquinas Devlin, O.P., Chairman of the Department of English, Rosary College, for reading the entire manuscript.

Grateful acknowledgement is also made to the Benedictines of Stanbrook Abbey for permission to use quotations from their editions of *The Way of Perfection* and *The Interior Castle*; to Thomas Baker for quotations from the Works of St. John of the Cross; to Benziger Brothers for the many quotations from their English edition of the *Summa Theologica*; to Burns, Oates, Washbourne for quotations from *The Dialogue*.

This translation is offered to Mary, Queen of the Most Holy rosary and Mediatrix of All Graces, and to St. Mary Magdalen, protectress of the Order of Preachers and patroness of the interior life, as a prayer that it may lead many souls to the contemplation of the mysteries of salvation in which they shared so profoundly.

Sister M. Timothea Doyle, O.P.

Foreword

Sister Mary Timothea Doyle has done us a real service in giving us this translation of Father R. Garrigou-Lagrange's classical work *Les Trois Ages de la Vie Interieure*. Doctrinally sound, this work has been accepted for its clear presentation of the way of perfection or, as St. Francis de Sales calls it, the life of devotion. The author is profound in his studies without losing that clarity of thought which is so necessary and helpful in works on the spiritual life. Analyzing the teaching of the great masters through the centuries, he has succeeded in giving us a synthesis of their thought which cannot but be helpful to those who are seeking closer and closer union with God.

The basic thought of this book is given in the words of our Blessed Savior: "Be ye perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect." We are called in our vocation as sons of God to dare to imitate divine perfection—to be participators of the divine nature. Our supernatural birthright, lost to us in Eden, was restored in the blood of the Savior on Calvary. Indeed human nature is weak, but in the grace of God it can soar to the heights of perfection and hold before it as its ideal the very perfection of God. To be in very truth in the light of Christian doctrine a son of God is the worthiest ambition of our souls.

The way is love. To be encompassed in the love of God for us and to seek always supernaturally to return to God love is the spiritual life of the Christian soul. Now love impels the soul to union with God, and God in His love gives the soul the capacity for supernatural union with Him. All the teachings on the spiritual life are synthesized in this one thought—love. Just how God leads the soul in divine love and how the soul may exercise itself in the discipline of love is the subject matter of the great works on the spiritual life.

Sublime indeed is the thought that Christian charity brings to our minds. We reach up to God, and God reaches down to us, and in divine love we are made sharers of the Divinity. All things we love in God, and because we love them in God we seek to realize in our use of them and relations with them the harmony of the divine will. Of its very nature charity is not quiescent but operative. The soul in the pursuit of the way of perfection labors tirelessly according to its state in life to bring all men to God. Were it to content itself with its own perfection, it would lose the very thing it seeks. How can we love God and not love with God? How can we find God without searching in love for the things which God loves? Certainly one of the fruits of the spiritual life is peace, but this peace postulates our conforming our wills with the divine will. All the noble aspirations of the heart of man, aspirations which so often seem unrealizable in our condition of human weakness, are answered in our seeking to be ever more and more perfect in the spiritual life.

Men are talking much these days about realism, and they tell us that in life idealism must yield to compromise. Yet in every circumstance in life we can be sons of God in supernatural union with Him. This fact is the very basis of true Christian realism. We must not and dare not be defeatists. What human nature can never do can be done in the supernatural power of divine grace. It is therefore opportune in these times to give us this translation of this classical work of the spiritual life because it strengthens us in our effort to work out more perfectly our vocation of sons of God. We can build a better world. Human weakness is not an impassable barrier. The Savior died on the cross for us and rose to glorious life. With the graces of Redemption we are strong enough to labor for the realization of God's plan and on our way to heaven to love with an operative love all those whom we meet on our pilgrimage of life.

We hope that pious souls will read this book, ponder over its pages, and gain new strength from it. It is a challenge to Christians to arise and labor unceasingly for the kingdom of Christ—wherein there is peace and true progress.

Samuel Cardinal Stritch Archbishop of Chicago

Introduction

We propose in this book to synthesize two other works, *Christian Perfection and Contemplation*, and *L'amour de Dieu et la croix de Jesus*. In those two works we studied, in the light of the principles of St. Thomas, the main problems of the spiritual life and in particular one which has been stated more explicitly in recent years, namely: Is the infused contemplation of the mysteries of faith and the union with God which results therefrom an intrinsically extraordinary grace, or is it, on the contrary, in the normal way of sanctity?

We purpose here to consider these questions again in a simpler and loftier manner, with the perspective needed the better to see the subordination of all the elements of the interior life in relation to union with God. With this end in view, we shall consider first of all the foundations of the interior life, then the elimination of obstacles, the progress of the soul purified and illuminated by the light of the Holy Ghost, the docility which it ought to have toward Him, and finally the union with God which the soul attains by this docility, by the spirit of prayer, and by the cross borne with patience, gratitude, and love.

By way of introduction, we shall briefly recall what constitutes the one thing necessary for every Christian, and we shall also recall how urgently this question is being raised at the present time.

I. THE ONE THING NECESSARY

As everyone can easily understand, the interior life is an elevated form of intimate conversation which everyone has with himself as soon as he is alone, even in the tumult of a great city. From the moment he ceases to converse with his fellow men, man converses interiorly with himself about what preoccupies him most. This conversation varies greatly according to the different ages of life; that of an old man is not that of a youth. It also varies greatly according as a man is good or bad.

As soon as a man seriously seeks truth and goodness, this intimate conversation with himself tends to become conversation with God. Little by little, instead of seeking himself in everything, instead of tending more or less consciously to make himself a center, man tends to seek God in everything, and to substitute for egoism love of God and of souls in Him. This constitutes the interior life. No sincere man will have any difficulty in recognizing it. The one thing necessary which Jesus spoke of to Martha and Mary⁷ consists in hearing the word of God and living by it.

The interior life thus conceived is something far more profound and more necessary in us than intellectual life or the cultivation of the sciences, than artistic or literary life, than social or political life. Unfortunately, some great scholars, mathematicians, physicists, and astronomers have no interior life, so to speak, but devote themselves to the study of their science as if God did not exist. In their moments of solitude they have no intimate conversation with Him. Their life appears to be in certain respects the search for the true and the good in a more or less definite and restricted domain, but it is so tainted with self-love and intellectual pride that we may legitimately question whether it will bear fruit for eternity. Many artists, literary men, and statesmen never rise above this level of purely human activity which is, in short, quite exterior. Do the depths of their souls live by God? It would seem not.

This shows that the interior life, or the life of the soul with God, well deserves to be called the one thing necessary, since by it we tend to our last end and assure our salvation. This last must not be too widely separated from progressive sanctification, for it is the very way of salvation.

There are those who seem to think that it is sufficient to be saved and that it is not necessary to be a saint. It is clearly not necessary to be a saint who performs miracles and whose sanctity is officially recognized by the Church. To be saved, we must take the way of salvation, which is identical with that of sanctity. There will be only saints in heaven, whether they enter there immediately after death or after purification in purgatory. No one enters heaven unless he has that sanctity which consists in perfect purity of soul. Every sin though it should be venial, must be effaced, and the punishment due to sin must be borne or remitted, in order that a soul may enjoy forever the vision of God, see Him as He sees Himself, and love Him as He loves Himself. Should a soul enter heaven before the total remission of its sins, it could not remain there and it would cast itself into purgatory to be purified.

The interior life of a just man who tends toward God and who already lives by Him is indeed the one thing necessary. To be a saint, neither intellectual culture nor great exterior activity is a requisite; it suffices that we live profoundly by God. This truth is evident in the saints of the early Church; several of those saints were poor people, even slaves. It is evident also in St. Francis, St. Benedict Joseph Labre, in the Cure of Ars, and many others. They all had a deep understanding of these words of our Savior: "For what doth it profit a man, if he gain the whole world, and suffer the loss of his own soul?"⁸ If people sacrifice so many things to save the life of the body, which must ultimately die, what should we not sacrifice to save the life of our soul, which is to last forever? Ought not man to love his soul more than his body? "Or what exchange shall a man give for his soul?"

our Lord adds.² “One thing is necessary,” He tells us.¹⁰ To save our soul, one thing alone is necessary: to hear the word of God and to live by it. Therein lies the best part, which will not be taken away from a faithful soul even though it should lose everything else.

II. THE QUESTION OF THE ONE THING NECESSARY AT THE PRESENT TIME

What we have just said is true at all times; but the question of the interior life is being more sharply raised today than in several periods less troubled than ours. The explanation of this interest lies in the fact that many men have separated themselves from God and tried to organize intellectual and social life without Him. The great problems that have always preoccupied humanity have taken on a new and sometimes tragic aspect. To wish to get along without God, first Cause and last End, leads to an abyss; not only to nothingness, but also to physical and moral wretchedness that is worse than nothingness. Likewise, great problems grow exasperatingly serious, and man must finally perceive that all these problems ultimately lead to the fundamental religious problem; in other words, he will finally have to declare himself entirely for God or against Him. This is in its essence the problem of the interior life. Christ Himself says: “He that is not with Me is against Me.”¹¹

The great modern scientific and social tendencies, in the midst of the conflicts that arise among them and in spite of the opposition of those who represent them, converge in this way, whether one wills it or not, toward the fundamental question of the intimate relations of man with God. This point is reached’ after many deviations. When man will no longer fulfill his great religious duties toward God who created him and who is his last End, he makes a religion for himself since he absolutely cannot get along without religion. To replace the superior ideal which he has abandoned, man may, for example, place his religion in science or in the cult of social justice or in some human ideal, which finally he considers in a religious manner and even in a mystical manner. Thus he turns away from supreme reality, and there arises a vast number of problems that will be solved only if he returns to the fundamental problem of the intimate relations of the soul with God.

It has often been remarked that today science pretends to be a religion. Likewise socialism and communism claim to be a code of ethics and present themselves under the guise of a feverish cult of justice, thereby trying to captivate hearts and minds. As a matter of fact, the modern scholar seems to have a scrupulous devotion to the scientific method. He cultivates it to such a degree that he often seems to prefer the method of research to the truth. If he bestowed equally serious care on his interior life, he would quickly reach sanctity. Often, however, this religion of science is directed toward the apotheosis of man rather than toward the love of God. As much must be said of social activity, particularly under the form it assumes in socialism and communism. It is inspired by a mysticism which purposes a transfiguration of man, while at times it denies in the most absolute manner the rights of God.

This is simply a reiteration of the statement that the religious problem of the relations of man with God is at the basis of every great problem. We must declare ourselves for or against Him; indifference is no longer possible, as our times show in a striking manner. The present world-wide economic crisis demonstrates what men can do when they seek to get along without God.

Without God, the seriousness of life gets out of focus. If religion is no longer a grave matter but something to smile at, then the serious element in life must be sought elsewhere. Some place it, or pretend to place it, in science or in social activity; they devote the selves religiously to the search for scientific truth or to the establishment of justice between classes or peoples. After a while they are forced to perceive that they have ended in fearful disorder and that the relations between individuals and nations become more and more difficult, if not impossible. As St. Augustine and St. Thomas¹² have said, it is evident that the same material goods, as opposed to those of the spirit, cannot at one and the same time belong integrally to several persons. The same house, the same land, cannot simultaneously belong wholly to several men, nor the same territory to several nations. As a result, interests conflict when man feverishly makes these lesser goods his last end.

St. Augustine, on the other hand, insists on the fact that the same spiritual goods can belong simultaneously and integrally to all and to each individual in particular. Without doing harm to another, we can fully possess the same truth, the same virtue, the same God. This is why our Lord says to us: “Seek ye therefore first the kingdom of God and His justice; and all these things shall be added unto you.”¹³ Failure to hearken to this lesson, is to work at one’s destruction and to verify once more the words of the Psalmist: “Unless the Lord build the house, they labor in vain that build it. Unless the Lord keep the city, he watcheth in vain that keepeth it.”¹⁴

If the serious element in life is out of focus, if it no longer is concerned with our duties toward God, but with the scientific and social activities of man; if man continually seeks himself instead of God, his last End, then events are not slow in showing him that he has taken an impossible way, which leads not only to nothingness, but to unbearable disorder and misery. We must again and again revert to Christ’s words: “He that is not with Me, is against Me: and he that gathereth not with Me, scattereth.”¹⁵ The facts confirm this declaration.

We conclude logically that religion can give an efficacious and truly realistic answer to the great modern problems only if it

is a religion that is profoundly lived, not simply a superficial and cheap religion made up of some vocal prayers and some ceremonies in which religious art has more place than true piety. As a matter of fact, no religion that is profoundly lived is without an interior life, without that intimate and frequent conversation which we have not only with ourselves but with God.

The last encyclicals of Pope Pius XI make this clear. To respond to what is good in the general aspirations of nations, aspirations to justice and charity among individuals, classes, and peoples, the Holy Father wrote the encyclicals on Christ the King, on His sanctifying influence in all His mystical body, on the family, on the sanctity of Christian marriage, on social questions, on the necessity of reparation, and on the missions. In all these encyclicals he deals with the reign of Christ over all humanity. The logical conclusion to be drawn is that religion, the interior life, must be profound, must be a true life of union with God if it is to keep the pre-eminence it should have over scientific and social activities. This is a manifest necessity.

III. THE AIM OF THIS WORK

How shall we deal with the interior life? We shall not take up in a technical manner many questions about sanctifying grace and the infused virtues that have been treated at length by theologians. We assume them here, and we shall revert to them only in the measure necessary for the understanding of what the spiritual life should be.

Our aim is to invite souls to become more interior and to tend to union with God. To do so, two very different dangers must be avoided.

Rather frequently the spirit animating scientific research even in these matters carries over details to such an extent that the mind is turned away from the contemplation of divine things. The majority of interior souls do not need many of the critical studies indispensable to the theologian. To understand them, they would need a philosophical initiation which they do not possess and which, in a sense, would hamper them who in an instant and in a different manner go higher, as in the case of St. Francis of Assisi. He was astonished to see that in the course of philosophy given to his religious, time was taken to prove the existence of God. Today, occasionally exaggerated specialization in studies produces in many minds a lack of the general view needed to judge wisely of things, even of those in which they are especially interested and whose relation with every thing else they no longer see. The cult of detail ought not to make us lose sight of the whole. Instead of becoming spiritual, we would then become materialistic, and under pretext of exact and detailed learning, we would turn away from the true interior life and from lofty Christian wisdom.

On the other hand, many books on religious subjects that are written in a popular style, and many pious books lack a solid doctrinal foundation. Popularization, because the kind of simplification imposed upon it is material rather than formal, often avoids the examination of certain fundamental and difficult problems from which, nevertheless, light would come, and at times the light of life.

To avoid these two opposite dangers, we shall follow the way pointed out by St. Thomas, who was not a popularizer and who is still the great classic authority on theology. He rose from the learned complexity of his first works and of the *Quaestiones disputatae* to the superior simplicity of the most beautiful articles of the *Summa theologica*. He ascended to this height so well that at the end of his life, absorbed in lofty contemplation, he could not dictate the end of his *Summa* because he could no longer descend to the complexity of the questions and articles that he still wished to compose.

The cult of detail and that of superficial simplification, each in its way alienates the soul from Christian contemplation, which rises above these opposing deviations like a summit toward which all prayerful souls tend.

IV. THE OBJECT OF ASCETICAL AND MYSTICAL THEOLOGY

One sees from the matter which ascetical and mystical theology should treat that it is a branch or a part of theology, an application of theology to the direction of souls. It must, therefore, proceed under the light of revelation, which alone gives a knowledge of the nature of the life of grace and of the supernatural union of the soul with God.

This part of theology is, above all, a development of the treatise on the love of God and of that on the gifts of the Holy Ghost, to show how they are applied or to lead souls to divine union.¹⁶ Similarly, casuistry is, in a less elevated domain, an application of moral theology to the practical discernment of what is obligatory under pain of mortal or venial sin. Moral theology ought to treat, not only of sins to be avoided, but of virtues to be practiced, and of docility in following the inspirations of the Holy Ghost. From this point of view, its applications are called ascetical and mystical theology.

Ascetical theology treats especially of the mortification of vices or defects and of the practice of the virtues. Mystical theology treats principally of docility to the Holy Ghost, of the infused contemplation of the mysteries of faith, of the union with God which proceeds from it, and also of extraordinary graces, such as visions and revelations, which sometimes accompany infused contemplation.¹⁷

We shall examine the question whether ascetical theology is essentially ordained to mystical theology by asking whether the infused contemplation of the mysteries of faith and the union with God that results from it is an essentially extraordinary grace,

such as visions and revelations, or whether in the perfect it is not rather the eminent but normal exercise of the gifts of the Holy Ghost, which are in all the just. The answer to this question, which has been discussed several times in recent years, will form the conclusion of this work.

V. THE METHOD OF ASCETICAL AND MYSTICAL THEOLOGY

We shall limit ourselves here to what is essential in regard to the method to be followed.¹⁸ We must avoid two contrary deviations that are easily grasped: one would result from the almost exclusive use of the descriptive or inductive method, the other from a contrary excess.

The almost exclusive use of the descriptive or inductive method would lead us to forget that ascetical and mystical theology is a branch of theology, and we would end by considering it a part of experimental psychology. We would thus assemble only the material of mystical theology. By losing the directing light, all would be impoverished and diminished. Mystical theology must be set forth by the great principles of theology on the life of grace, on the infused virtues, and on the seven gifts; in so doing, light is shed on all of it, and one is face to face with a science and not a collection of more or less well described phenomena.

If the descriptive method were used almost exclusively, we would be struck especially by the more or less sensible signs of the mystical state and not by the basic law of the progress of grace, whose essential supernaturalness is of too elevated an order to fall under the grasp of observation. More attention might then be given to certain extraordinary and, so to speak, exterior graces, such as visions, revelations, stigmata, than to the normal and elevated development of sanctifying grace, of the infused virtues, and of the gifts of the Holy Ghost. By so doing, we might be led to confound with what is essentially extraordinary that which is only extrinsically so, that is, what is eminent but normal; to confound intimate union with God in its elevated forms with the extraordinary and relatively inferior graces which sometimes accompany it.

Lastly, the exclusive use of the descriptive method might give too much importance to this easily established fact, that intimate union with God and the infused contemplation of the mysteries of faith are relatively rare. This idea might lead us to think that all interior and generous souls are not called to it, even in a general and remote manner.¹⁹ This would be to forget the words of our Lord so frequently quoted by the mystics in this connection: "Many are called, but few are chosen."

On the other hand, care must be taken to avoid another deviation that would spring from the almost exclusive use of the deductive theological method. Some souls that are rather inclined to over-simplify things would be led to deduce the solution of the most difficult problems of spirituality by starting from the accepted doctrine in theology about the infused virtues and the gifts, as it is set forth by St. Thomas, without sufficiently considering the admirable descriptions given by St. Teresa, St. John of the Cross, St. Francis de Sales, and other saints, of the various degrees of the spiritual life, especially of the mystical union. It is to these facts that the principles must be applied, or rather it is these facts, first of all well understood in themselves, that must be illuminated by the light of principles, especially to discern what is truly extraordinary in them and what is eminent but normal.

The excessive use of the deductive method in this case would lead to a confusion radically opposed to the one indicated above. Since, according to tradition and St. Thomas, the seven gifts of the Holy Ghost are in every soul in the state of grace, we might thus be inclined to believe that the mystical state or infused contemplation is very frequent, and we might confound with them what is only their prelude, as simplified effective prayer.²⁰ We would thus be led not to take sufficiently into account the concomitant phenomena of certain degrees of the mystical union, such as suspension of the faculties and ecstasy, and we would fall into the opposite extreme from that of the partisans of the solely descriptive method.

Practically, as a result of these two excesses two extremes also are to be avoided in spiritual direction: advising souls to leave the ascetical way too soon or too late. We will discuss this matter at length in the course of this work.

Obviously the two methods, the inductive and the deductive, or the analytic and the synthetic, must be combined.

The concepts and the facts of the spiritual life must be analyzed. First of all, must be analyzed the concepts of the interior life and of Christian perfection, of sanctity, which the Gospel gives us, in order that we may see clearly the end proposed by the Savior Himself to all interior souls, and see this end in all its elevation without in any way diminishing it. Then must be analyzed the facts: the imperfections of beginners, the active and passive purifications, the various degrees of union, and so on, to distinguish what is essential in them and what is accessory.

After this work of analysis, we must make a synthesis and point out what is necessary or very useful and desirable to reach the full perfection of Christian life, and what, on the other hand, is properly extraordinary and in no way required for the highest sanctity.²¹

Several of these questions are very difficult, either because of the elevation of the subject treated, or because of the contingencies that are met with in the application and that depend on the temperament of the persons to be directed or on the good pleasure of God, who, for example, sometimes grants the grace of contemplation to beginners and withdraws it

temporarily from advanced souls. Because of these multiple difficulties, the study of ascetical and mystical theology requires a profound knowledge of theology, especially of the treatises on grace, on the infused virtues, on the gifts of the Holy Ghost in their relations with the great mysteries of the Trinity, the Incarnation, the redemption, and the Blessed Eucharist. It requires also familiarity with the great spiritual writers, especially those who have been designated by the Church as guides in these matters.

VI. THE DISTINCTION BETWEEN ASCETICAL AND MYSTICAL THEOLOGY AND THEIR RELATIONS TO EACH OTHER

We must recall here the division between ascetical and mystical theology that was generally accepted until the eighteenth century, and then the modification that Scaramelli and those who followed him introduced at that time. The reader will, therefore, more readily understand why, with several contemporary theologians, we return to the division that seems to us truly traditional and conformable to the principles of the great masters.

Until the eighteenth century, authors generally set forth under the title *Theologia mystica* all the questions that ascetical and mystical theology treats of today. This is evident from the title of the works written by Blessed Bartholomew of the Martyrs, O.P., Philip of the Blessed Trinity, O.C.D., Anthony of the Holy Ghost, O.C.D., Thomas Vallgornera, O.P., Schram, O.S.B., and others. Under the title *Theologia mystica* all these authors treated of the purgative way of beginners, of the illuminative way of proficients, and of the unitive way of the perfect. In one or the other of these last two parts, they spoke of infused contemplation and the extraordinary graces which sometimes accompany it, that is to say, visions, revelations, and like favors. Moreover, in their introduction these authors customarily treated of experimental mystical theology, that is, of infused contemplation itself, for their treatises were directed to it and to the intimate union with God which results from it.

An example of this division which was generally admitted in former times may be found in Vallgornera's *Mystica theologia divi Thomae* (1662). He closely follows the Carmelite, Philip of the Blessed Trinity, by linking the division Philip gave with that of earlier authors and with certain characteristic texts from the works of St. John of the Cross on the period when the passive purifications of the senses and of the spirit generally appear. He divides his treatise for contemplatives into three parts (the purgative way, the illuminative way, the unitive way).

1. The purgative way, proper to beginners, in which he treats of the active purification of the external and internal senses, of the passions, of the intellect and the will, by mortification, meditation, and prayer, and finally of the passive purification of the senses, which is like a second conversion and in which infused contemplation begins. It is the transition to the illuminative way.

This last point is of prime importance in this division, and it conforms closely to two of the most important texts from the works of St. John of the Cross: "The night of sense is common, and the lot of many: these are the beginners."²² "The soul began to set out on the way of the spirit, the way of proficients, which is also called the illuminative way, or the way of infused contemplation, wherein God Himself teaches and refreshes the soul."²³ Infused contemplation begins, according to St. John of the Cross, with the passive purification of the senses, which thus marks the transition from the way of beginners to that of proficients. Vallgornera clearly preserves this doctrine in this division as well as in the one that follows.

2. The illuminative way, proper to proficients, in which, after a preliminary chapter on the divisions of contemplation, are discussed the gifts of the Holy Ghost, infused contemplation, which proceeds especially from the gifts of understanding and wisdom and which is declared desirable for all interior souls,²⁴ as morally necessary for the full perfection of Christian life. After several articles relating to extraordinary graces (visions, revelations, interior words), this second part of the work closes with a chapter of nine articles dealing with the passive purification of the spirit, which marks the passage to the unitive way. This also is what St. John of the Cross taught.²⁵

3. The unitive way, proper to the perfect, in which is discussed the intimate union of the contemplative soul with God and its degrees up to the transforming union. Vallgornera considers this division traditional, truly conformable to the doctrine of the fathers, to the principles of St. Thomas, and to the teaching of the greatest mystics who have written on the three ages of the spiritual life, noting how the transition from one to the other is generally made.²⁶

In the eighteenth century, Scaramelli (1687–1752), who was followed by many authors of that period, proposed an entirely different division. First of all, he does not treat of ascetical and mystical theology in the same work but in two separate works, comprising four treatises:⁽¹⁾ Christian perfection and the means that lead to it; ⁽²⁾ Obstacles (or the purgative way); ⁽³⁾ The proximate dispositions to Christian perfection, consisting in the moral virtues in the perfect degree (or the way of proficients); ⁽⁴⁾ The essential perfection of the Christian, consisting in the theological virtues and especially in charity (the love of conformity in the perfect). This ascetical directory does not, so to speak, discuss the gifts of the Holy Ghost. The high degree of

the moral and theological virtues therein described is, nevertheless, not reached without the gifts, according to the common teaching of the doctors.

The *Direttorio mistico* is composed of five treatises: (1) The introduction, in which are discussed the gifts of the Holy Ghost and graces *gratis datae*; (2) Acquired and infused contemplation, for which the gifts suffice, as Scaramelli recognizes (chap. 14); (3) The degrees of indistinct infused contemplation, from passive recollection to the transforming union. In chapter 32, Scaramelli admits that several authors teach that infused contemplation may be humbly desired by all interior souls, but he ends by concluding that practically it is better not to desire it before receiving a special call: “*altiora te ne quaesieris*”;²⁷ (4) The degrees of distinct infused contemplation (visions and extraordinary interior words); (5) The passive purifications of the senses and the spirit.

It is surprising to find only at the end of this mystical directory the treatise on the passive purification of the senses which, in the opinion of St. John of the Cross and the authors quoted above, marks the entrance into the illuminative way.

By a fear of quietism, at times excessive, which cast discredit on mystical theology, many authors in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries followed Scaramelli, who was most highly esteemed by them. According to their point of view, ascetical theology treats of the exercises which lead to perfection according to the ordinary way, whereas mystical theology treats of the extraordinary way, to which the infused contemplation of the mysteries of faith would belong. At the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the present period this tendency appears again clearly marked in the study of mental prayer by Father de Maumigny, S.J.,²⁸ in the writings of Bishop Farges,²⁹ and in the work of the Sulpician, Father Pourrat.³⁰ According to these authors, ascetical theology is not only distinct from mystical theology, but is separated from it; it is not ordained to it, for mystical theology treats only of extraordinary graces which are not necessary for the full perfection of Christian life. Taking this point of view, some writers even maintained that, since St. Teresa of the Child Jesus did not receive extraordinary graces, she sanctified herself by the ascetical way and not by the mystical way. Strange supposition.

In the last thirty years, Father Arintero, O.P.,³¹ Monsignor Saudreau,³² the Eudist, Father Lamballe,³³ Father de la Taille, S.J.,³⁴ Father Gardeil, O.P.,³⁵ Father Joret, O.P.,³⁶ Father Gerest,³⁷ several Carmelites in France and in Belgium,³⁸ Benedictines such as Dom Huijben, Dom Louismet, and several others,³⁹ examined attentively the bases of the position taken by Scaramelli and his successors.

As we have shown at length elsewhere,⁴⁰ we have been led, as these authors were, to formulate the three following questions on the subject of the division given by Scaramelli and his successors:

1. Is this absolute distinction or separation between ascetical and mystical theology entirely traditional, or is it not rather an innovation made in the eighteenth century? Does it conform to the principles of St. Thomas and to the doctrine of St. John of the Cross? St. Thomas teaches that the seven gifts of the Holy Ghost, while specifically distinct from the infused virtues, are, nevertheless, in all the just, for they are connected with charity.⁴¹ He says, moreover, that they are necessary for salvation, for a just man may find himself in difficult circumstances where even the infused virtues would not suffice and where he needs a special inspiration of the Holy Ghost to which the gifts render us docile. St. Thomas likewise considers that the gifts intervene rather frequently in ordinary circumstances to give to the acts of the virtues in generous interior souls a perfection, an impulse, and a promptness which would not exist without the superior intervention of the Holy Ghost.⁴²

On the other hand, St. John of the Cross, as we have said, wrote these most significant words: “The passive purification of the senses is common. It takes place in the greater number of beginners.”⁴³ According to St. John, infused contemplation begins with it. And again he says: “The soul began to set out on the way of the spirit, the way of proficients, which is also called the illuminative way, or the way of infused contemplation, wherein God Himself teaches and refreshes the soul.”⁴⁴ In this text the holy doctor did not wish to affirm something accidental, but something normal. St. Francis de Sales expresses the same thought⁴⁵. The division proposed by Scaramelli could not be reconciled with this doctrine because he speaks of the passive purifications of the senses and the spirit only at the end of the unitive way, as not only eminent but essentially extraordinary.

2. It may be asked whether such a distinction or separation between ascetical and mystical theology does not diminish the unity of the spiritual life. A good division, in order to be necessarily basic and not superficial an accidental, should rest on the very definition of the whole to be divided, on the nature of, this whole, which in this case is the life of grace, called by tradition the “grace of the virtues and the gifts”;⁴⁶ for the seven gifts of the Holy Ghost, being connected with charity, are part of the spiritual organism and are necessary for perfection.

3. Does not the sharply marked division between ascetical and mystical theology, proposed by Scaramelli and several others, also diminish the elevation of evangelical perfection, when it treats of it in ascetical theology, taking away from it the gifts of the Holy Ghost, the infused contemplation of the mysteries of faith, and the union which results therefrom? Does not this new conception weaken the motives for practicing mortification and for exercising the virtues, and does it not do so by losing sight

of the divine intimacy for which this work should prepare us? Does it not lessen the illuminative and unitive ways when it speaks of them simply from the ascetical point of view? Can these two ways normally exist without the exercise of the gifts of the Holy Ghost proportioned to that of charity and of the other infused virtues? Finally, does not this new conception diminish also the importance and the gravity of mystical theology, which, separated thus from ascetical theology, seems to become a luxury in the spirituality of some privileged souls, and one that is not without danger?

Are there six ways (three ascetical and ordinary, and three mystical and extraordinary, not only in fact but in essence) and not just three ways, three ages of the spiritual life, as the ancients used to say?

As soon as ascetical treatises on the illuminative and unitive ways are separated from mystical theology, they contain scarcely more than abstract considerations first on the moral and then on the theological virtues. On the other hand, if they treat practically and concretely of the progress and the perfection of these virtues, as Scaramelli does in his *Direttorio ascetico*, this perfection, according to the teaching of St. John of the Cross, is manifestly unattainable without the passive purifications, at least without that of the senses, and without the cooperation of the gifts of the Holy Ghost. The question then arises whether the passive purification of the senses in which, according to St. John of the Cross, infused contemplation and the mystical life, properly so called, begins is something essentially extraordinary or, on the contrary, a normal grace, the principle of a second conversion, which marks the entrance into the illuminative way. Without this passive purification, can a soul reach the perfection which Scaramelli speaks of in his *Direttorio ascetico*? Let us not forget what St. Teresa says: "For instance, they read that we must not be troubled when men speak ill of us, that we are to be then more pleased than when they speak well of us; that we must despise our own good name, be detached from our kindred... with many other things of the same kind. The disposition to practice this must be, in my opinion, the gift of God; for it seems to me a supernatural good."⁴⁷ By this statement the saint means that they are due to a special inspiration of the Holy Ghost, like the prayers which she calls "supernatural" or infused.

For these different reasons the contemporary authors whom we quoted above reject the absolute distinction and separation between ascetical and mystical theology that was introduced in the eighteenth century.

It is important to note here that the division of a science or of one of the branches of theology is not a matter of slight importance. This may be seen by the division of moral theology, which is notably different as it is made according to the distinction of the precepts of the decalogue, or according to the distinction of the theological and moral virtues. If moral theology is divided according to the precepts of the decalogue, several of which are negative, more insistence is placed on sins to be avoided than on virtues to be practiced more and more perfectly; and often the grandeur of the supreme precept of the love of God and of one's neighbor, which dominates the decalogue and which ought to be as the soul of our life, no longer stands forth clearly enough. On the contrary, if moral theology is divided according to the distinction of the virtues, then all the elevation of the theological virtues will be evident, especially that of charity over all the moral virtues, which it should inspire and animate. If this division is made, the quickening impulse of the theological virtues is felt, especially when they are accompanied by the special inspirations of the Holy Ghost. Moral theology thus conceived develops normally into mystical theology, which is, as we see in the work of St. Francis de Sales, a simple development of the treatise on the love of God.

What, then, is ascetical theology for the contemporary theologians who return to the traditional division? According to the principles of St. Thomas Aquinas, the doctrine of St. John of the Cross and also of St. Francis de Sales, ascetical theology treats of the purgative way of beginners who, understanding that they should not remain retarded and tepid souls, exercise themselves generously in the practice of the virtues, but still according to the human mode of the virtues, *ex industria propria*, with the help of ordinary actual grace. Mystical theology, on the contrary, begins with the illuminative way, in which proficients, under the illumination of the Holy Ghost, already act in a rather frequent and manifest manner according to the superhuman mode of the gifts of the Holy Ghost.⁴⁸ Under the special inspiration of the interior Master, they no longer act *ex industria propria*, but the superhuman mode of the gifts, latent until now or only occasionally patent, becomes quite manifest and frequent.

According to these authors, the mystical life is not essentially extraordinary, like visions and revelations, but something eminent in the normal way of sanctity. They consider this true even for souls called to sanctify themselves in the active life, such as a St. Vincent de Paul. They do not at all doubt that the saints of the active life have had normally rather frequent infused contemplation of the mysteries of the redeeming Incarnation, of the Mass, of the mystical body of Christ, of the value of eternal life, although these saints differ from pure contemplatives in this respect, that their infused contemplation is more immediately ordained to action, to all the works of mercy.

It follows that mystical theology is useful not alone for the direction of some souls led by extraordinary ways, but also for the direction of all interior souls who do not wish to remain retarded, who tend generously toward perfection, and who endeavor to maintain union with God in the midst of the labors and contradictions of everyday life. From this point of view, a spiritual director's ignorance of mystical theology may become a serious obstacle for the souls he directs, as St. John of the Cross remarks in the prologue of *The Ascent of Mount Carmel*. If the sadness of the neurasthenic should not be taken for the passive

purification of the senses, neither should melancholy be diagnosed when the passive purification does appear.

From what we have just said, it is evident that ascetical theology is ordained to mystical theology.

In short, for all Catholic authors, mystical theology which does not presuppose serious asceticism is false. Such was that of the quietists, who, like Molinos, suppressed ascetical theology by thrusting themselves into the mystical way before receiving that grace, confounding acquired passivity, which is obtained by the cessation of acts, of activity, and which turns to somnolence, with infused passivity, which springs from the special inspiration of the Holy Ghost to which the gifts render us docile. By this radical confusion, the quietism of Molinos suppressed asceticism and developed into a caricature of true mysticism.

Lastly, it is of prime importance to remark that the normal way of sanctity may be judged from two very different points of view. We may judge it by taking our nature as a starting point, and then the position that we defend as traditional will seem exaggerated. We may also judge it by taking as a starting point the supernatural mysteries of the indwelling of the Blessed Trinity, the redeeming Incarnation, and the Blessed Eucharist. This manner of judging *per altissimam causam* is the only one that represents the judgment of wisdom; the other manner judges by the lowest cause, and we know how “spiritual folly,” which St. Thomas speaks of, is contrary to wisdom.⁴⁹

If the Blessed Trinity truly dwells in us, if the Word actually was made flesh, died for us, is really present in the Holy Eucharist, offers Himself sacramentally for us every day in the Mass, gives Himself to us as food, if all this is true, then only the saints are fully in order, for they live by this divine presence through frequent, quasiexperimental knowledge and through an ever-growing love in the midst of the obscurities and difficulties of life. And the life of close union with God, far from appearing in its essential quality as something intrinsically extraordinary, appears alone as fully normal. Before reaching such a union, we are like people still half-asleep, who do not truly live sufficiently by the immense treasure given to us and by the continually new graces granted to those who wish to follow our Lord generously.

By sanctity we understand close union with God, that is, a great perfection of the love of God and neighbor, a perfection which nevertheless always remains in the normal way, for the precept of love has no limits.⁵⁰ To be more exact, we shall say that the sanctity in question here is the normal, immediate prelude of the life of heaven, a prelude which is realized, either on earth before death, or in purgatory, and which assumes that the soul is fully purified, is capable of receiving the beatific vision immediately. This is the meaning of the words “prelude of eternal life” used in the title of this work.

When we say, in short, that infused contemplation of the mysteries of faith is necessary for sanctity, we mean morally necessary; that is, in the majority of cases a soul could not reach sanctity without it. We shall add that without it a soul will not in reality possess the full perfection of Christian life, which implies the eminent exercise of the theological virtues and of the gifts of the Holy Ghost which accompany them. The purpose of this book is to establish this thesis.

VII. DIVISION OF THIS WORK

Following what we have said, we shall divide this book into five parts:

I. The sources of the interior life and its end.

The life of grace, the indwelling of the Blessed Trinity, the influence of Christ the Mediator and of Mary Mediatrix on us. Christian perfection, to which the interior life is ordained, and the obligation of each individual to tend to it according to his condition.

II. The purification of the soul in beginners.

The removal of obstacles, the struggle against sin and its results, and against the predominant fault; the active purification of the senses, of the memory, the will, and the understanding. The use of the sacraments for the purification of the soul. The prayer of beginners. The second conversion or passive purification of the senses in order to enter the illuminative way of proficients.

III. The progress of the soul under the light of the Holy Ghost.

The spiritual age of proficients. The progress of the theological and moral virtues. The gifts of the Holy Ghost in proficients. The progressive illumination of the soul by the Sacrifice of the Mass and Holy Communion. The contemplative prayer of proficients. Questions relating to infused contemplation: its nature, its degrees; the call to contemplation; the direction of souls in this connection.

IV. The union of perfect souls with God.

The entrance into this way by the passive purification of the soul. The spiritual age of the perfect. The heroic degree of the theological and moral virtues. Perfect apostolic life and infused contemplation. The life of reparation. The transforming union. The perfection of love in its relation to infused contemplation, to the spiritual espousals and spiritual marriage.

V. Extraordinary graces.

The graces gratis datae. How they differ from the seven gifts of the Holy Ghost, according to St. Thomas. Application of this doctrine to extraordinary graces, according to the teaching of St. John of the Cross. Divine revelations: interior words, the stigmata, and ecstasy.

Conclusion. Reply to the question: Is the infused contemplation of the mysteries of faith and the union with God which results from it an essentially extraordinary grace, or is it in the normal way of sanctity? Is it the normal prelude to eternal life, to the beatific vision to which all souls are called?

We could discuss here the terminology used by the mystics as compared with that used by theologians. The question is of great importance. Its meaning and its import will, however, be better grasped later on, that is, at the beginning of the part of this work that deals with the illuminative way.

We could also at the end of this introduction set forth in general terms what the fathers and the great doctors of the Church teach us in the domain of spirituality. It will, however, be more profitable to do so at the end of the first part of this work when we treat of the traditional doctrine of the three ways and of the manner in which it should be understood.

Moreover, we have elsewhere set forth this teaching and that of different schools of spirituality.⁵¹ On this point Monsignor Saudreau's work, *La vie d'union a Dieu et les moyens d'y arriver d'apres les grands mattres de la spiritualite*,⁵² may be consulted with profit. It will be well also to read Father Pourrat's study, *La spiritualite chretienne*. This work is conceived from a point of view opposed to the book mentioned above, for it considers every essentially mystical grace as extraordinary. We recommend particularly the excellent work of Father Cayre, A.A., *Precis de patrologie*,⁵³ in which he sets forth with great care and in a very objective manner the spiritual doctrine of the fathers and of the great doctors of the Church, including St. John of the Cross and St. Francis de Sales.⁵⁴

PART 1

The Sources of the Interior Life and Its End

Prologue

Since the interior life is an increasingly conscious form of the life of grace in every generous soul, we shall first of all discuss the life of grace to see its value clearly. We shall then see the nature of the spiritual organism of the infused virtues and of the gifts of the Holy Ghost, which spring from sanctifying grace in every just soul. We shall thus be led to speak of the indwelling of the Blessed Trinity in the souls of the just, and also of the continual influence exercised on them by our Lord Jesus Christ, universal Mediator, and by Mary, Mediatrix of all graces.

Such are the very elevated sources of the interior life; in their loftiness they resemble the high mountain sources of great rivers. Because our interior life descends to us from on high, it can reascend even to God and lead us to a very close union with Him. After speaking, in this first part, of the sources of interior life, we shall treat of its end, that is, of Christian perfection to which it is directed, and of everyone's obligation to tend toward it, according to his condition. In all things the end should be considered first; for it is first in the order of intention, although it may be last in the order of execution. The end is desired first of all, even though it is last to be obtained. For this reason our Lord began His preaching by speaking of the beatitudes, and for this reason also moral theology begins with the treatise on the last end to which all our acts must be directed.

Chapter 1

The Life of Grace, Eternal life begun

The interior life of a Christian presupposes the state of grace, which is opposed to the state of mortal sin. In the present plan of Providence every soul is either in the state of grace or in the state of mortal sin; in other words, it is either turned toward God, its supernatural last end, or turned away from Him. No man is in a purely natural state, for all are called to the supernatural end, which consists in the immediate vision of God and the love which results from that vision. From the moment of creation, man was destined for this supreme end. It is to this end that we are led by Christ who, after the Fall, offered Himself as a victim for the salvation of all men.

To have a true interior life it is doubtless not sufficient to be in the state of grace, like a child after baptism or every penitent after the absolution of his sins. The interior life requires further a struggle against everything that inclines us to fall back into sin, a serious propensity of the soul toward God. If we had a profound knowledge of the state of grace, we would see that it is not only the principle of a true and very holy interior life, but that it is the germ of eternal life. We think that insistence on this point from the outset is important, recalling the words of St. Thomas: “The good of grace in one is greater than the good of nature in the whole universe”;⁵⁵ for grace is the germ of eternal life, incomparably superior to the natural life of our soul or to that of the angels.

This fact best shows us the value of sanctifying grace, which we received in baptism and which absolution restores to us if we have had the misfortune to lose it.⁵⁶

The value of a seed can be known only if we have some idea of what should grow from it; for example, in the order of nature, to know the value of the seed contained in an acorn, we must have seen a fully developed oak. In the human order, to know the value of the rational soul which still slumbers in a little child, we must know the normal possibilities of the human soul in a man who has reached his full development. Likewise, we cannot know the value of sanctifying grace, which is in the soul of every baptized infant and in all the just, unless we have considered, at least imperfectly, what the full development of this grace will be in the life of eternity. Moreover, it should be seen in the very light of the Savior’s words, for they are “spirit and life” and are more savory than any commentary. The language of the Gospel, the style used by our Lord, lead us more directly to contemplation than the technical language of the surest and loftiest theology. Nothing is more salutary than to breathe the pure air of these heights from which flow down the living waters of the stream of Christian doctrine.

ETERNAL LIFE PROMISED BY THE SAVIOR TO MEN OF GOOD WILL

The expression “eternal life” rarely occurs in the Old Testament, where the recompense of the just after death is often presented in a symbolical manner under the figure, for example, of the Promised Land. The rare occurrence of the expression is more easily understood when we remember that after death the just of the Old Testament had to wait for the accomplishment of the passion of the Savior and the sacrifice of the cross to see the gates of heaven opened. Everything in the Old Testament was directed primarily to the coming of the promised Savior.

In the preaching of Jesus, everything is directed immediately toward eternal life. If we are attentive to His words, we shall see how the life of eternity differs from the future life spoken of by the best philosophers, such as Plato. The future life they spoke of belonged, in their opinion, to the natural order; they thought it “a fine risk to run,”⁵⁷ without having absolute certitude about it. On the other hand, the Savior speaks with the most absolute assurance not only of a future life, but of eternal life superior to the past, the present, and the future; an entirely supernatural life, measured like the intimate life of God, of which it is the participation, by the single instant of immobile eternity.

Christ tells us that the way leading to eternal life is narrow,⁵⁸ and that to obtain that life we must turn away from sin and keep the commandments of God.⁵⁹ On several occasions He says in the Fourth Gospel: “He who heareth My word and believeth Him that sent Me, hath life everlasting,”⁶⁰ that is, he who believes in Me, the Son of God, with a living faith united to charity, to the practice of the precepts, that man has eternal life begun. Christ also affirms this in the eight beatitudes as soon as He begins to preach: “Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.... Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after justice: for they shall have their fill.... Blessed are the clean of heart: for they shall see God.”⁶¹ What is eternal life, then, if not this repletion, this vision of God in His kingdom? In particular to those who suffer persecution for justice’ sake is it said: “Be glad and rejoice, for your reward is very great in heaven.”⁶² Before His passion Jesus says even more clearly, as St. John records: “Father, the hour is come. Glorify Thy Son that Thy Son may glorify Thee. As Thou hast given Him power over all

flesh, that He may give eternal life to all whom Thou hast given Him. Now this is eternal life: that they may know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom Thou hast sent.”⁶³

St. John the Evangelist himself explains these words of the Savior when he writes: “Dearly beloved, we are now the sons of God; and it hath not yet appeared what we shall be. We know that when He shall appear we shall be like to Him: because we shall see Him as He is.”⁶⁴ We shall see Him as He is, and not only by the reflection of His perfections in creatures, in sensible nature, or in the souls of the saints, in their words and their acts; we shall see Him immediately as He is in Himself.

St. Paul adds: “We see (God) now through a glass in a dark manner; but then face to face. Now I know in part; but then I shall know even as I am known.”⁶⁵ Observe that St. Paul does not say that I shall know Him as I know myself, as I know the interior of my conscience. I certainly know the interior of my soul better than other men do; but it has secrets from me, for I cannot measure all the gravity of my directly or indirectly voluntary faults. God alone knows me thoroughly; the secrets of my heart are perfectly open only to His gaze.

St. Paul actually says that then I shall know Him even as I am known by Him. In the same way that God knows the essence of my soul and my inner life without any intermediary, so I shall see Him without the intermediary of any creature, and even, theology adds,⁶⁶ without the intermediary of any created idea. No created idea can, in fact, represent such as He is in Himself the eternally subsistent, pure intellectual radiance that is God and His infinite truth. Every created idea is finite; it is a concept of one or another perfection of God, of His being, of His truth or His goodness, of His wisdom or His love, of His mercy or His justice. These divers concepts of the divine perfections are, however, incapable of making us know such as it is in itself the supremely simple divine essence, the Deity or the intimate life of God. These multiple concepts are to the intimate life of God, to the divine simplicity, somewhat as the seven colors of the rainbow are to the white light from which they proceed. On earth we are like men who have seen only the seven colors and who would like to see the pure light which is their eminent source. As long as we have not seen the Deity, such as It is in Itself, we shall not succeed in seeing the intimate harmony of the divine perfections, in particular that of infinite mercy and infinite justice. Our created ideas of the divine attributes are like little squares of mosaic which slightly harden the spiritual physiognomy of God. When we think of His justice, it may appear too rigid to us; when we think of the gratuitous predilections of His mercy, they may seem arbitrary to us. On reflection, we say to ourselves that in God justice and mercy are one and the same thing and that there is no real distinction between them. We affirm with certitude that this is true, but we do not yet see the intimate harmony of these divine perfections. To see it, we should have to see immediately the divine essence, such as it is in itself, without the intermediary of any created idea.

This vision will constitute eternal life. No one can express the joy and love that will be born in us of this vision. It will be so strong, so absolute a love of God that thenceforth nothing will be able to destroy it or even to diminish it. It will be a love by which we shall above all rejoice that God is God, infinitely holy, just, and merciful. We shall adore all the decrees of His providence in view of the manifestation of His goodness. We shall have entered into His beatitude, according to Christ’s own words: “Well done, good and faithful servant, because thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will place thee over many things. Enter thou into the joy of thy Lord.”⁶⁷ We shall see God as He sees Himself, immediately, without however exhausting the depth of His being, His love, and His power, and we shall love Him as He loves Himself. We shall also see our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Such is eternal beatitude in its essence, not to speak of the accidental joy that we shall experience in seeing and loving the Blessed Virgin and all the saints, more particularly the souls whom we knew during our time on earth.

THE SEED OF ETERNAL LIFE IN US

The immediate vision of God, of which we have just spoken, surpasses the natural capacity of every created intellect, whether angelic or human. Naturally a created intellect may indeed know God by the reflection of His perfections in the created order, angelic or human, but it cannot see Him immediately in Himself as He sees Himself.⁶⁸ If a created intellect could by its natural powers alone see God immediately, it would have the same formal object as the divine Intellect; it would then be of the same nature as God. This would be the pantheistic confusion of a created nature and the divine nature.

A created intellect can be raised to the immediate vision of the divine essence only by a gratuitous help, by a grace of God. In the angel and in us this grace somewhat resembles a graft made on a wild shrub to enable it to bear good fruit. The angel and the human soul become capable of a supernatural knowledge of God and a supernatural love only if they have received this divine graft, habitual or sanctifying grace, which is a participation in the divine nature and in the inner life of God. Only this grace, received in the essence of our soul as a free gift, can render the soul radically capable of essentially divine operations, can make it capable of seeing God immediately as He sees Himself and of loving Him as He loves Himself. In other words, the deification of the intellect and that of the will presuppose the deification of the soul itself (in its essence), whence these faculties spring.

When this grace is consummated and inamissible, it is called glory. From it proceed, in the intellects of the blessed in

heaven, the supernatural light which gives them the strength to see God, and in their wills the infused charity which makes them love Him without being able thereafter to turn away from Him.

Through baptism we have already received the seed of eternal life, for through it we received sanctifying grace which is the radical principle of that life; and with sanctifying grace we received infused charity, which ought to last forever.

This is what our Savior told the Samaritan woman, as St. John recounts: "If thou didst know the gift of God, and who He is that saith to thee: Give Me to drink; thou perhaps wouldst have asked of Him, and He would have given thee living water.... Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again; but he that shall drink of the water that I will give him shall not thirst forever. But the water that I will give him shall become in him a fountain of water, springing up into life everlasting."⁶⁹ If one should ask whether these words of our Lord belong to the ascetical or the mystical order, the question would seem unintelligent; for, if our Lord is speaking here of the life of heaven, all the more do His words apply to the close union which prepares the soul for that life.

St. Thomas says: "He who will drink of the living water of grace given by the Savior will no longer desire another, but he will desire this water more abundantly.... Moreover, whereas material water descends, the spiritual water of grace rises. It is a living water ever united to its (eminent) source and one that springs up to eternal life, which it makes us merit."⁷⁰ This living water comes from God, and that is why it can reascend even to Him.

Likewise, in the temple at Jerusalem on the last day of the feast of tabernacles, Christ stood and cried in a loud voice: "If any man thirst, let him come to Me, and drink. He that believeth in Me, as the Scripture saith: Out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water."⁷¹ He who drinks spiritually, believing in the Savior, draws from the source of living water, and can draw from it not only for himself but also for other souls to be saved.

On several occasions, as we have already remarked, Jesus repeats: "He that believeth in Me, hath everlasting life."⁷² Not only will he have it later on, but in a sense he already possesses it, for the life of grace is eternal life begun.

It is, in fact, the same life in its essence, just as the seed which is in an acorn has the same life as the full-grown oak, and as the spiritual soul of the little child is the same one that will eventually develop in the mature man.

Fundamentally, the same divine life exists as a germ or a seed in the Christian on earth and as a fully developed life in the saints in heaven. It is these who truly live eternal life. This explains why Christ said also: "He that eateth My flesh and drinketh My blood, hath everlasting life: and I will raise him up in the last day."⁷³ "The kingdom of God cometh not with observation: neither shall they say: Behold here or behold there. For lo, the kingdom of God is within you."⁷⁴ It is hidden there like the mustard seed, like the leaven which causes the dough to rise, like the treasure buried in the field.

How do we know that we have already received this life which should last forever? St. John explains the matter to us at length: "We know that we have passed from death to life because we love the brethren. He that loveth not, abideth in death. Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer. And you know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in himself."⁷⁵ "These things I write to you, that you may know that you have eternal life, you who believe in the name of the Son of God."⁷⁶ Jesus had said: "Amen, amen I say to you: If any man keep My word, he shall not see death forever."⁷⁷ In fact, the liturgy expresses this idea in the preface of the Mass for the Dead: "For to those who believe in Thee, Lord, life is only changed, not taken away"; on the contrary, it reaches its full development in heaven. All tradition declares that the life of grace on earth is in reality the seed of glory. St. Thomas delights also in saying: "For grace is nothing else than a beginning of glory in us."⁷⁸ Bossuet often expresses himself in the same terms.⁷⁹

This explains why St. Thomas likes to say: "The good of grace in one is greater than the good of nature in the whole universe."⁸⁰ The slightest degree of sanctifying grace contained in the soul of an infant after baptism is more precious than the natural good of the entire universe, all angelic natures taken together included therein; for the least degree of sanctifying grace belongs to an enormously superior order, to the order of the inner life of God, which is superior to all miracles and to all the outward signs of divine revelation.⁸¹

The same supernatural life, the same sanctifying grace, is in the just on earth and in the saints in heaven. This is likewise true of infused charity, with these two differences: on earth we know God not in the clarity of vision, but in the obscurity of infused faith; and besides, though we hope to possess Him in such a way as never to lose Him, we can lose Him here on earth through our own fault.

In spite of these two differences pertaining to faith and hope, the life is the same because it is the same sanctifying grace and the same charity, both of which should last forever. This is exactly what Jesus said to the Samaritan woman: "If thou didst know the gift of God... thou perhaps wouldst have asked of Him.... He that shall drink of the water that I will give him, shall not thirst forever: but the water that I will give him shall become in him a fountain of water, springing up into life everlasting."⁸² By the light of this principle we must judge what our interior life should be and what should be its full, normal development that it may be the worthy prelude of the life of eternity. Since sanctifying grace, the infused virtues, and the gifts are intrinsically ordained to eternal life, are they not also ordained to the mystical union? Is not this union the normal prelude of the

life of eternity in souls that are in truth completely generous?

AN IMPORTANT CONSEQUENCE

From what we have just said, we may at least infer the nonextraordinary character of the infused contemplation of the mysteries of faith and of the union with God which results therefrom. This presumption will be more and more confirmed in what follows and will become a certitude.

Sanctifying grace and charity, which unite us to God in His intimate life, are, in fact, very superior to graces *gratis datae* and extraordinary, such as prophecy and the gift of tongues, which are only signs of the divine intervention and which by themselves do not unite us closely to God. St. Paul affirms this clearly,⁸³ and St. Thomas explains it quite well.⁸⁴

Infused contemplation, an act of infused faith illumined by the gifts of understanding and wisdom, proceeds, as we shall see, from sanctifying grace, called “the grace of the virtues and the gifts,”⁸⁵ received by all in baptism, and not from graces *gratis datae* and extraordinary. Theologians commonly concede this. We may, therefore, even now seriously presume that infused contemplation and the union with God resulting from it are not intrinsically extraordinary, like prophecy or the gift of tongues. Since they are not essentially extraordinary, are they not in the normal way of sanctity?

A second and even more striking reason springs immediately from what we have just said: namely, sanctifying grace, being by its very nature ordained to eternal life, is also essentially ordained, in a normal manner, to the proximate perfect disposition to receive the light of glory immediately. This proximate disposition is perfect charity with the keen desire for the beatific vision, an ardent desire which is ordinarily found only in the union with God resulting from the infused contemplation of the mysteries of salvation.

This contemplation is, therefore, not intrinsically extraordinary like prophecy, but something eminent which already appears indeed to be in the normal way of sanctity, although relatively rare like lofty perfection.

We must likewise add that the ardent desire for the beatific vision is found according to its full perfection only in the transforming union, or the higher mystical union, which consequently does not seem to be outside the normal way of sanctity. To grasp the meaning and import of this reason, we may remark that, if there is one good which the Christian ought to desire keenly, it is God seen face to face and loved above all, without any further possibility of sin. Evidently there should be proportion between the intensity of the desire and the value of the good desired; in this case, its value is infinite. We should all be “pilgrims of the Absolute” “while... we are absent from the Lord.”⁸⁶

Finally, as sanctifying grace is essentially ordained to eternal life, it is also ordained to a proximate disposition for us to receive the light of glory immediately after death without passing through purgatory. Purgatory is a punishment which presupposes a sin that could have been avoided, and an insufficient satisfaction that could have been completed if we had accepted with better dispositions the sufferings of the present life. It is certain, in fact, that no one will be detained in purgatory except for sins he could have avoided or for negligence in making reparation for them. Normally purgatory should be spent in this life while meriting, while growing in love, instead of after death without merit.

The proximate disposition to receive the light of glory immediately after death presupposes a true purification analogous to that in souls that are about to leave purgatory and that have an ardent desire for the beatific vision.⁸⁷ This ardent desire exists ordinarily in this life only in the union with God which results from the infused contemplation of the mysteries of salvation. Hence contemplation stands out clearly even now, not as an extraordinary grace, but as an eminent grace in the normal way of sanctity.

The keen desire for God, the sovereign Good, which is the normal proximate disposition to the beatific vision, is admirably expressed by St. Paul: “Though our outward man is corrupted, yet the inward man is renewed day by day.... For in this also we groan, desiring to be clothed upon with our habitation that is from heaven.... Now He that maketh us for this very thing, is God, who hath given us the pledge of the Spirit.”⁸⁸

Obviously, that we may treat of questions of ascetical and mystical theology in a fitting manner, we must not lose sight of these heights as they are made known to us by Holy Scripture explained by the theology of the great masters. If there is a field in which men must be considered not only as they are, but as they ought to be, that field is evidently spirituality. One should be able there to breathe freely the air of the heights above human conventions. Blessed are those tried souls who, like St. Paul of the Cross, breathe freely only in the domain of God and who aspire to Him with all their strength.

Chapter 2

The Interior Life and Intimate Conversation with God

“Our conversation is in heaven.” (Phil. 3:20.)

The interior life, as we said, presupposes the state of grace, which is the seed of eternal life. Nevertheless the state of grace, which exists in every infant after baptism and in every penitent after the absolution of his sins, does not suffice to constitute what is customarily called the interior life of a Christian. In addition there are required a struggle against what would make us fall back into sin and a serious tendency of the soul toward God.

From this point of view, to give a clear idea of what the interior life should be, we shall do well to compare it with the intimate conversation that each of us has with himself. If one is faithful, this intimate conversation tends, under the influence of grace, to become elevated, to be transformed, and to become a conversation with God. This remark is elementary; but the most vital and profound truths are elementary truths about which we have thought for a long time, by which we have lived, and which finally become the object of almost continual contemplation.

We shall consider successively these two forms of intimate conversation: the one human, the other more and more divine or supernatural.

CONVERSATION WITH ONESELF

As soon as a man ceases to be outwardly occupied, to talk with his fellow men, as soon as he is alone, even in the noisy streets of a great city, he begins to carry on a conversation with himself. If he is young, he often thinks of his future; if he is old, he thinks of the past and his happy or unhappy experience of life makes him usually judge persons and events very differently.....

If a man is fundamentally egotistical, his intimate conversation with himself is inspired by sensuality or pride. He converses with himself about the object of his cupidity, of his envy; finding therein sadness and death, he tries to flee from himself, to live outside of himself, to divert himself in order to forget the emptiness and the nothingness of his life. In this intimate conversation of the egoist with himself there is a certain very inferior self-knowledge and a no less inferior self-love.

He is acquainted especially with the sensitive part of his soul, that part which is common to man and to the animal. Thus he has sensible joys, sensible sorrows, according as the weather is pleasant or unpleasant, as he wins money or loses it. He has desires and aversions of the same sensible order; and when he is opposed, he has moments of impatience and anger prompted by inordinate self-love. But the egoist knows little about the spiritual part of his soul, that which is common to the angel and to man. Even if he believes in the spirituality of the soul and of the higher faculties, intellect and will, he does not live in this spiritual order. He does not, so to speak, know experimentally this higher part of himself and he does not love it sufficiently. If he knew it, he would find in it the image of God and he would begin to love himself, not in an egotistical manner for himself, but for God. His thoughts almost always fall back on what is inferior in him, and though he often shows intelligence and cleverness which may even become craftiness and cunning; his intellect, instead of rising, always inclines toward what is inferior to it. It is made to contemplate God, the supreme truth, and it often dallies in error, sometimes obstinately defending the error by every means. It has been said that, if life is not on a level with thought, thought ends by descending to the level of life. All declines, and one's highest convictions gradually grow weaker.

The intimate conversation of the egoist with himself proceeds thus to death and is therefore not an interior life. His self-love leads him to wish to make himself the center of everything, to draw everything to himself, both persons and things. Since this is impossible, he frequently ends in disillusionment and disgust; he becomes unbearable to himself and to others, and ends by hating himself because he wished to love himself excessively. At times he ends by hating life because he desired too greatly what is inferior in it.⁸⁹

If a man who is not in the state of grace begins to seek goodness, his intimate conversation with himself is already quite different. He converses with himself, for example, about what is necessary to live becomingly and to support his family. This at times preoccupies him greatly; he feels his weakness and the need of placing his confidence no longer in himself alone, but in God.

While still in the state of mortal sin, this man may have Christian faith and hope, which subsist in us even after the loss of charity as long as we have not sinned mortally by incredulity, despair, or presumption. When this is so, this man's intimate conversation with himself is occasionally illumined by the supernatural light of faith; now and then he thinks of eternal life and desires it, although this desire remains weak. He is sometimes led by a special inspiration to enter a church to pray.

Finally, if this man has at least attrition for his sins and receives absolution for them, he recovers the state of grace and charity, the love of God and neighbor. Thenceforth when he is alone, his intimate conversation with himself changes. He begins to love himself in a holy manner, not for himself but for God, and to love his own for God; he begins to understand that he must pardon his enemies and love them, and to wish eternal life for them as he does for himself. Often, however, the intimate conversation of a man in the state of grace continues to be tainted with egoism, self-love, sensuality, and pride. These sins are no longer mortal in him, they are venial; but if they are repeated, they incline him to fall into a serious sin, that is, to fall back into spiritual death. Should this happen, this man tends again to flee from himself because what he finds in himself is no longer life but death. Instead of making a salutary reflection on this subject, he may hurl himself back farther into death by casting himself into pleasure, into the satisfactions of sensuality or of pride.

In a man's hours of solitude, this intimate conversation begins again in spite of everything, as if to prove to him that it cannot stop. He would like to interrupt it, yet he cannot do so. The center of the soul has an irrestrainable need which demands satisfaction. In reality, God alone can answer this need, and the only solution is straightway to take the road leading to Him. The soul must converse with someone other than itself. Why? Because it is not its own last end; because its end is the living God, and it cannot rest entirely except in Him. As St. Augustine puts it: "Our heart is restless, until it repose in Thee."⁹⁰

INTERIOR CONVERSATION WITH GOD

The interior life is precisely an elevation and a transformation of the intimate conversation that everyone has with himself as soon as it tends to become a conversation with God.

St. Paul says: "For what man knoweth the things of a man but the spirit of a man that is in him? So the things also that are of God no man knoweth, but the Spirit of God."⁹¹ The Spirit of God progressively manifests to souls of good will what God desires of them and what He wishes to give them. May we receive with docility all that God wishes to give us! Our Lord says to those who seek Him: "Thou wouldst not seek Me if thou hadst not already found Me."

This progressive manifestation of God to the soul that seeks Him is not unaccompanied by a struggle; the soul must free itself from the bonds which are the results of sin, and gradually there disappears what St. Paul calls "the old man" and there takes shape "the new man."

He writes to the Romans: "I find then a law, that when I have a will to do good, evil is present with me. For I am delighted with the law of God, according to the inward man; but I see another law in my members, fighting against the law of my mind."⁹²

What St. Paul calls "the inward man" is what is primary and most elevated in us: reason illumined by faith and the will, which should dominate the sensibility, common to man and animals.

St. Paul also says: "For which cause we faint not; but though our outward man is corrupted, yet the inward man is renewed day by day."⁹³ His spiritual youth is continually renewed, like that of the eagle, by the graces which he receives daily. This is so true that the priest who ascends the altar can always say, though he be ninety years old: "I will go in to the altar of God: to God who giveth joy to my youth."⁹⁴

St. Paul insists on this thought in his epistle to the Colossians: "Lie not one to another: stripping yourselves of the old man with his deeds, and putting on the new, him who is renewed unto knowledge, according to the image of Him that created him, where there is neither Gentile nor Jew... nor barbarian nor Scythian, bond nor free. But Christ is all and in all."⁹⁵ The inward man is renewed unceasingly in the image of God, who does not grow old. The life of God is above the past, the present, and the future; it is measured by the single instant of immobile eternity. Likewise the risen Christ dies no more and possesses eternal youth. Now He vivifies us by ever new graces that He may render us like Himself. St. Paul wrote in a similar strain to the Ephesians: "For this cause I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ... that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened by His Spirit with might unto the inward man, that Christ may dwell by faith in your hearts; that, being rooted and founded in charity, you may be able to comprehend with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth; to know also the charity of Christ, which surpasseth all knowledge, that you may be filled unto all the fullness of God."⁹⁶

St. Paul clearly depicts in these lines the interior life in its depth, that life which tends constantly toward the contemplation of the mystery of God and lives by it in an increasingly closer union with Him. He wrote this letter not for some privileged souls alone, but to all the Christians of Ephesus as well as those of Corinth.

Furthermore, St. Paul adds: "Be renewed in the spirit of your mind: and put on the new man, who according to God is created in justice and holiness of truth.... And walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath delivered Himself for us, an oblation and a sacrifice to God for an odor of sweetness."⁹⁷

In the light of these inspired words, which recall all that Jesus promised us in the beatitudes and all that He gave us in dying for us, we can define the interior life as follows: It is a supernatural life which, by a true spirit of abnegation and prayer, makes us tend to union with God and leads us to it.

It implies one phase in which purification dominates, another of progressive illumination in view of union with God, as all tradition teaches, thus making a distinction between the purgative way of beginners, the illuminative way of proficients, and the unitive way of the perfect.

The interior life thus becomes more and more a conversation with God, in which man gradually frees himself from egoism, self-love, sensuality, and pride, and in which, by frequent prayer, he asks the Lord for the ever new graces that he needs.⁹⁸

As a result, man begins to know experimentally no longer only the inferior part of his being, but also the highest part. Above all, he begins to know God in a vital manner; he begins to have experience of the things of God. Little by little the thought of his own ego, toward which he made everything converge, gives place to the habitual thought of God; and egotistical love of self and of what is less good in him also gives place progressively to the love of God and of souls in God. His interior conversation changes so much that St. Paul can say: “Our conversation is in heaven.”⁹⁹ St. Thomas often insisted on this point.¹⁰⁰

Therefore the interior life is in a soul that is in the state of grace, especially a life of humility, abnegation, faith, hope, and charity, with the peace given by the progressive subordination of our feelings and wishes to the love of God, who will be the object of our beatitude.

Hence, to have an interior life, an exceedingly active exterior apostolate does not suffice, nor does great theological knowledge. Nor is the latter necessary. A generous beginner, who already has a genuine spirit of abnegation and prayer, already possesses a true interior life which ought to continue developing.

In this interior conversation with God, which tends to become continual, the soul speaks by prayer, *oratio*, which is speech in its most excellent form. Such speech would exist if God had created only a single soul or one angel; for this creature, endowed with intellect and love, would speak with its Creator. Prayer takes the form now of petition, now of adoration and thanksgiving; it is always an elevation of the soul toward God. And God answers by recalling to our minds what has been said to us in the Gospel and what is useful for the sanctification of the present moment. Did not Christ say: “But the Paraclete, the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things and bring all things to your mind, whatsoever I shall have said to you”?¹⁰¹

Man thus becomes more and more the child of God; he recognizes more profoundly that God is his Father, and he even becomes more and more a little child in his relations with God. He understands what Christ meant when He told Nicodemus that a man must return to the bosom of God that he may be spiritually reborn, and each day more intimately so, by that spiritual birth which is a remote similitude of the eternal birth of the Word.¹⁰² The saints truly follow this way, and then between their souls and God is established that conversation which does not, so to speak, cease. Thus it was said that St. Dominic knew how to speak only of God or with God; this is what made it possible for him to be always charitable toward men and at the same time prudent, strong, and just.

This conversation with God is established through the influence of Christ, our Mediator, as the liturgy often says, particularly in the hymn *Jesu dulcis memoria*, which is a splendid expression of the Christian’s interior life:

Jesu, spes poenitentibus,
Quam pius es petentibus!
Quam bonus te quaerentibus!
Sed quid invenientibus!
Nec lingua valet dicere,
Nec littera exprimere,
Expertus potest credere
Quid sit Jesum diligere.

Let us strive to be of the number of those who seek Him, and to whom it is said: “Thou wouldst not seek Me, if thou hadst not already found Me.”

Chapter 3

The Spiritual Organism

The interior life, which presupposes the state of grace, consists, as we have seen, in a generous tendency of the soul toward God, in which little by little each one's intimate conversation with himself is elevated, is transformed, and becomes an intimate conversation of the soul with God. It is, we said, eternal life begun in the obscurity of faith before reaching its full development in the clarity of that vision which cannot be lost.

Better to comprehend what this seed of eternal life, *semen gloriae*, is in us, we must ponder the fact that from sanctifying grace spring forth in our faculties the infused virtues, both theological and moral, and also the seven gifts of the Holy Ghost; virtues and gifts which are like the subordinated functions of one and the same organism, a spiritual organism, which ought to develop until our entrance into heaven.

ARTICLE I—THE NATURAL LIFE AND THE SUPERNATURAL LIFE OF THE SOUL

We must distinguish clearly in our soul what belongs to its very nature and what is an entirely gratuitous gift of God. The same distinction must be made for the angels who also have a nature which, though entirely spiritual, is very inferior to the gift of grace.

If we carefully consider the human soul in its nature, we see two quite different regions in it: one belongs to the sensible order, the other to the suprasensible or intellectual order. The sensitive part of the soul is that which is common to men and animals; it includes the external senses and the internal senses, comprising the imagination, the sensible memory, and also sensibility, or the sensitive appetite, whence spring the various passions or emotions, which we call sensible love and hatred, desire and aversion, sensible joy and sadness, hope and despair, audacity and fear, and anger. All this sensitive life exists in the animal, whether its passions are mild like those of the dove or lamb, or whether they are strong like those of the wolf and the lion.

Above this sensitive part common to men and animals, our nature likewise possesses an intellectual part, which is common to men and angels, although it is far more vigorous and beautiful in the angel. By this intellectual part our soul towers above our body; this is why we say that the soul is spiritual, that it does not intrinsically depend on the body and will thus be able to survive the body after death.

From the essence of the soul in this elevated region spring our two higher faculties, the intellect and the will.¹⁰³ The intellect knows not only sensible qualities, colors, and sounds, but also being, the intelligible reality, of necessary and universal truths, such as the following: "Nothing happens without a cause, and, in the last analysis, without a supreme cause. We must do good and avoid evil. Do what you ought to, come what may." An animal will never attain to the knowledge of these principles; even if its imagination were continually growing in perfection, it would never attain to the intellectual order of necessary and universal truths. Its imagination does not pass beyond the order of sensible qualities, known here or there in their contingent singularity.

Since the intellect knows the good in a universal manner, and not only the delectable or useful good but the upright and reasonable good (for example: Die rather than become a traitor), it follows that the will can love this good, will it, and accomplish it. Thereby the intellect immensely dominates the sensitive part or the emotions common to men and animals. By his intellect and his will, man resembles the angel; although his intellect, in contrast to the angelic intellect, depends in this present life on the senses, which propose to it the first objects that it knows.

The two higher faculties, the intellect and the will, can develop greatly as we see in men of genius and superior men of action. These faculties could, however, develop forever without ever knowing and loving the intimate life of God, which is of another order, entirely supernatural, and supernatural alike for angels and men. Man and the angel can indeed know God naturally from without, by the reflection of His perfections in creatures; but no created and creatable intellect can by its natural powers attain, even confusedly and obscurely, the essential and formal object of the divine intellect.¹⁰⁴ To hold that it could be done would be to maintain that this created intellect is of the same nature as God, since it would be specified by the same formal object.¹⁰⁵ As St. Paul says: "For what man knoweth the things of a man, but the spirit of a man that is in him? So the things also that are of God no man knoweth, but the Spirit of God."¹⁰⁶ This order is essentially supernatural.

Sanctifying grace, the seed of glory, introduces us into this higher order of truth and life. It is an essentially supernatural life, a participation in the intimate life of God, in the divine nature, since it even now prepares us to see God some day as He sees

Himself and to love Him as He loves Himself. St. Paul has declared to us: “That eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man, what things God hath prepared for them that love Him. But to us God hath revealed them by His Spirit. For the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God.”¹⁰⁷

Sanctifying grace, which makes us begin to live in this higher, supra-angelic order of the intimate life of God, is like a divine graft received in the very essence of the soul to elevate its vitality and to make it bear no longer merely natural fruits but supernatural ones, meritorious acts that merit eternal life for us.

This divine graft of sanctifying grace is, therefore, in us an essentially supernatural life, immensely superior to a sensible miracle and above the natural life of our spiritual and immortal soul.¹⁰⁸

Even now this life of grace develops in us under the form of the infused virtues and of the seven gifts of the Holy Ghost. As in the natural order, our intellectual and sensitive faculties spring from the very essence of our soul, so in the supernatural order, from sanctifying grace, received in the essence of the soul, spring, in our superior and inferior faculties, the infused virtues and the gifts which constitute, with the root from which they proceed, our spiritual or supernatural organism.¹⁰⁹ It was given to us in baptism, and is restored to us by absolution if we have the misfortune to lose it.

The spiritual organism may be expressed in the following table of the virtues and the gifts.

V I R T U E S	Theological	Charity -->	Gift of Wisdom	G I F T S
		Faith -->	Gift of	
		Hope -->	Understanding	
		Prudence -->	Gift of Knowledge	
	Moral	Justice	Gift of Counsel	
		- Religion -->	Gift of Piety	
		- Penance	Gift of Fortitude	
		- Obedience	Gift of Fear	
		Fortitude -->		
		- Patience		
		Temperance-->		
		- Humility		
		- Meekness		
		- Chasity		

In connection with this table it would be well to consult St. Thomas' treatise on each of the virtues, where he speaks of the corresponding gift.¹¹⁰ The gift of fear corresponds both to temperance and to hope,¹¹¹ but this latter virtue is also aided by the gift of knowledge, which shows us the emptiness of created things and thereby makes us desire God and depend on Him.¹¹²

ARTICLE II—THE THEOLOGICAL VIRTUES

The theological virtues are infused virtues which have for their object God Himself, our supernatural last end. This is why they are called theological. By contrast, the moral virtues have for their object the supernatural means proportioned to our last end. Thus prudence directs our acts to this end; religion makes us render to God the worship that is due Him; justice makes us give to everyone what we owe him; fortitude and temperance regulate the sensible part of our soul to prevent it from going astray and to make it cooperate, according to its manner, in our progress toward God.¹¹³

Among the theological virtues, infused faith, which makes us believe all that God has revealed because He is Truth itself, is like a higher spiritual sense which allows us to hear a divine harmony that is inaccessible to every other means of knowing. Infused faith is like a higher sense of hearing for the audition of a spiritual symphony which has God for its composer. This explains why there is an immense difference between the purely historical study of the Gospel and of the miracles which confirm it and the supernatural act of faith by which we believe in the Gospel as in the word of God. A very learned man who seeks the truth sincerely can make a historical and critical study of the Gospel and of the miracles which confirm it without as yet coming to the point where he believes. He will believe supernaturally only after receiving the grace of faith, which will introduce him into a higher world, superior even to the natural life of the angels. "Faith... is the gift of God," says St. Paul.¹¹⁴ It is the basis of justification, for it makes us know the supernatural end toward which we must tend.¹¹⁵ The Church has defined against the Semi-Pelagians that even the beginning of faith is a gift of grace.¹¹⁶ All the great theologians have shown that infused faith is essentially supernatural, of a supernatural character very superior to that of the sensible miracle and also to that of prophecy which announces a contingent future in the natural order, such as the end of a war. Faith makes us, in fact, adhere supernaturally and infallibly to what God reveals to us about His intimate life, according as the Church, which is charged with preserving revelation, proposes it to us.

¹¹⁷Infused faith belongs thus to an order immensely superior to the historical and critical study of the Gospel. As Lacordaire rightly says: "A scholar may study Catholic doctrine, not reject it bitterly, and may even say repeatedly: 'You are blessed to have faith; I should like to have it, but I cannot believe.' And he tells the truth: he wishes and he cannot (as yet), for study and good faith do not always conquer the truth, so that it may be clear that rational certitude is not the first certitude on which Catholic doctrine rests. This scholar therefore knows Catholic doctrine; he admits its facts; he feels its power; he agrees that there existed a man named Jesus Christ, who lived and died in a prodigious manner. He is touched by the blood of the martyrs, by the constitution of the Church; he will willingly say that it is the greatest phenomenon that has passed over the world. He will almost say that it is true. And yet he does not conclude; he feels himself oppressed by truth, as one is in a dream where one sees without seeing. The day comes, however, when this scholar drops on his knees; feeling the wretchedness of man, he lifts his hands to heaven and exclaims: 'Out of the depths I have cried to Thee, O Lord!' At this moment something takes place in him, scales drop from his eyes, a mystery is accomplished, and he is changed. He is a man, meek and humble of heart; he can

die, he has conquered the truth.”¹¹⁸

If acquired faith, born of the historical examination of the Gospel and of the miracles which confirm it, were sufficient to attain the formal motive of Christian faith, infused faith would be useless, as would likewise infused hope and infused charity. Natural good will, spoken of by the Pelagians, would suffice. In the opinion of the Pelagians, grace and the infused virtues were not absolutely necessary for salvation, but only for the easier accomplishment of the acts of Christian life.¹¹⁹

Infused faith is like a faculty of supernatural audition, like a higher musical sense, which permits us to hear the spiritual harmonies of the kingdom of heaven, to hear, in a way, the voice of God through the prophets and His Son before we are admitted to see Him face to face. Between the unbeliever, who studies the Gospel, and the believer, there is a difference similar to that which exists between two persons who are listening to a Beethoven symphony, one of whom has a musical ear and the other has not. Both hear all the notes of the symphony, but one alone grasps its meaning and its soul. Similarly, only the believer adheres supernaturally to the Gospel as to the supernatural word of God; and he adheres to it even though untutored, while the learned man with all his means of criticism cannot, without infused faith, adhere to it in this manner. “He that believeth in the Son of God, hath the testimony of God in himself.”¹²⁰

This is what prompted Lacordaire to say: “What takes place in us when we believe is a phenomenon of intimate and superhuman light. I do not say that exterior things do not act on us as rational motives of certitude; but the very act of this supreme certitude, which I speak of, affects us directly like a luminous phenomenon (infused light of faith); I would even add, like a transluminous phenomenon.... We are affected by a transluminous light.... Otherwise how could there be proportion between our adherence, which would be natural and rational, and an object that surpasses nature and reason?...¹²¹ Similarly sympathetic intuition between two men accomplishes in a single moment what logic could not have, brought about in many years. Just so, a sudden illumination sometimes enlightens the genius.

“A convert will tell you: ‘I read, reasoned, wished, and I did not arrive. Then one day, I don’t know how, on the street corner or at my fireside, I don’t know, but I was no longer the same; I believed.... What took place in me at the moment of final conviction is of a totally different nature from what preceded. Remember the two disciples who were going to Emmaus.’ “¹²²

Fifty years ago, a man who did not yet know radio would have been surprised to hear it said that the day would come when a symphony that was being played in Vienna could be heard in Rome. By infused faith we hear a spiritual symphony which originates in heaven. The perfect chords of this symphony are called the mysteries of the Trinity, the Incarnation, the redemption, the Mass, and eternal life. By this superior sense of hearing man is guided toward eternity; he ought ever to advance toward the summit from which this harmony comes.

To tend effectively toward this supernatural end and to reach it, man has received two helps, hope and charity, which are like two wings. Without them he could make progress only in the direction indicated by reason; with them he flies in the direction pointed out by faith.

Just as our intellect cannot know our supernatural end without the infused light of faith, so our will cannot tend toward it unless its powers are augmented, increased more than tenfold, raised to a higher order. For this the will needs a supernatural love and a new impulse.

By hope we desire to possess God, and in order to attain Him we rely, not on our natural powers but on the help that He promised us. We rely on God Himself who always comes to the assistance of those who invoke Him.

Charity is a superior and more disinterested love of God. It makes us love God, not only in order to possess Him some day, but for Himself and more than ourselves, because of His infinite goodness, which is more lovable in itself than all the benefits we receive from it.¹²³ This virtue makes us love God above all else as a friend who has first loved us. It ordains to Him the acts of all the other virtues, which it vivifies and renders meritorious. Charity is our great supernatural force, the power of love which through centuries of persecution has surmounted all obstacles, even in weak children, such as St. Agnes and St. Lucy.

A man illumined by faith thus advances toward God by the two wings of hope and love. As soon as he sins mortally, however, he loses sanctifying grace and charity, since he turns away from God, whom he ceases to love more than himself. But divine mercy preserves infused faith and infused hope in him as long as he does not sin mortally against these virtues. He still preserves the light which indicates the road to be followed and he can still entrust himself to infinite mercy in order to ask of it the grace of conversion.

Of these three theological virtues, charity is the highest, and together with sanctifying grace, it ought to endure forever. “Charity,” says St. Paul, “never falleth away.... Now there remain faith, hope, and charity, these three: but the greatest of these is charity.”¹²⁴ It will last forever, eternally, when faith will have disappeared to give place to vision, and when hope will be succeeded by the inamissible possession of God clearly known.

Such are the superior functions of the spiritual organism: the three theological virtues which grow together, and with them the infused moral virtues that accompany them.

To understand what the action of the spiritual organism should be, we must clearly distinguish on the level below the theological virtues, the acquired moral virtues which were described by the moralists of pagan antiquity and which can exist without the state of grace, and the infused moral virtues which were unknown to pagan moralists and which are described in the Gospel. The acquired moral virtues, as their name indicates, are acquired by the repetition of acts under the direction of more or less cultivated natural reason. The infused moral virtues are called infused because God alone can produce them in us. They are not the result of the repetition of our acts; we received them in baptism as parts of our spiritual organism, and absolution restores them to us if we have had the misfortune to lose them. The acquired moral virtues, known by the pagans, have an object accessible to natural reason; the infused moral virtues have an essentially supernatural object commensurate with our supernatural end, an object which would be inaccessible without the infused light of faith in eternal life, in the gravity of sin, in the redemptive value of our Savior's passion, in the value of grace and of the sacraments.¹²⁵

In relation to the interior life, we shall discuss first of all the acquired moral virtues, then the infused moral virtues, and finally the relationship of the first to the second. This subject matter is important, especially since some souls consecrated to God do not in their youth give sufficient importance to the moral virtues. Over and above a rather calm and pure sensibility, they seem to have the three theological virtues, but they almost lack the moral virtues of prudence, justice, fortitude, and so on.¹²⁶ Something like an intermediary stage seems to be lacking in their souls. Yet they have the infused moral virtues, but not the corresponding acquired moral virtues in a sufficient degree. Others, on the contrary, who are older and have seen the importance of the moral virtues of prudence, justice, fortitude, and so on, in social life, do not sufficiently value the theological virtues, which are, however, incomparably higher since they unite us to God.

THE ACQUIRED MORAL VIRTUES

We shall ascend progressively from the lower degrees of natural morality to those of supernatural morality. We must, first of all, observe with St. Thomas that in a man in the state of mortal sin there are often false virtues, such as the temperance of the miser. He practices it, not for love of honest and reasonable good, not for the sake of living according to right reason, but for love of that useful good, money. Similarly, if he pays his debts, it is rather to avoid the costs of a lawsuit than for love of justice.

Above these false virtues, true acquired moral virtues may exist even in a man in the state of mortal sin. Some practice sobriety in order to live reasonably; for the same motive they pay their debts and teach some good principles to their children. But as long as a man remains in the state of mortal sin these true virtues remain in the state of a somewhat unstable disposition (in statu dispositionis facile mobilis); they are not yet in the state of solid virtue (difficile mobilis). Why is this? The answer is that, as long as a man is in the state of mortal sin, his will is habitually turned away from God. Instead of loving Him above all else, the sinner loves himself more than God, with the consequent result that he shows great weakness in accomplishing moral good, even of the natural order.

Moreover, the true acquired virtues which are in a man in the state of mortal sin lack solidity because they are not connected, because they are not sufficiently supported by the closely related moral virtues that are often lacking. We may take as an example a soldier who is naturally inclined to acts of bravery and has often shown himself courageous, but who is also inclined to become intoxicated. It may happen that, by reason of intemperance, on certain days he fails in the acquired virtue of fortitude and neglects his essential duties as a soldier.¹²⁷ This man, who is inclined by temperament to be courageous, has not the virtue of fortitude as a virtue. Intemperance makes him fail in prudence, even in the domain of the virtue of fortitude. Prudence, which ought to direct all the moral virtues, supposes in fact that our will and our sensible appetites are habitually rectified as regards the end of these virtues. A man who drives several horses hitched to a chariot must see to it that each animal is already broken and docile. Now prudence is like the driver of all the moral virtues, auriga virtutum, and it ought to have them all in hand, so to speak. One does not go without the other: they are connected in prudence, which directs them.

Therefore, that true acquired virtues may not be simply in a state of unstable disposition, and that they may be in a state of solid virtue (in statu virtutis), they must be connected. That this may be so, a man must no longer be in the state of mortal sin, but his will must be set straight in regard to his last end. He must love God more than himself, at least with a real and efficacious love of esteem, if not with a love that is felt. This love is impossible without the state of grace and without charity.¹²⁸ But after justification or conversion, these true acquired virtues may come to be stable virtues; they may become connected, relying on each other. Finally, under the influx of infused charity, they become the principle of acts meritorious of eternal life. For this reason, some theologians, such as Duns Scotus, have even thought it not necessary that we should have infused moral virtues.

THE INFUSED MORAL VIRTUES

Are the acquired moral virtues we have just spoken of sufficient, under the influence of charity, to constitute the spiritual

organism of the virtues in a Christian? Must we receive infused moral virtues?

In conformity with tradition and with a decision of Pope Clement V at the Council of Vienne,¹²⁹ the Catechism of the Council of Trent (Part II, On baptism and its effects), answers: “The grace (sanctifying), which baptism confers, is accompanied by the glorious cortege of all the virtues, which, by a special gift of God, penetrate the soul simultaneously with it.” This gift is an admirable effect of the Savior’s passion which is applied to us by the sacrament of regeneration.

Moreover, in this bestowal of the infused moral virtues, there is a lofty fitness that has been well set forth by St. Thomas.¹³⁰ The means, he observes, must be proportioned to the end. By the infused theological virtues we are raised and directed toward the supernatural last end. Hence it is highly fitting that we should be raised and directed by the infused moral virtues in regard to supernatural means capable of leading us to our supernatural end.

God provides for our needs not less in the order of grace than in that of nature. Therefore, since in the order of nature He has given us the capacity to succeed in practicing the acquired moral virtues, it is highly fitting that in the order of grace He should give us infused moral virtues.

The acquired moral virtues do not suffice in a Christian to make him will, as he ought, the supernatural means ordained to eternal life. St. Thomas says, in fact, that there is an essential difference between the acquired temperance described by pagan moralists, and the Christian temperance spoken of in the Gospel.¹³¹ The difference is analogous to that of an octave between two musical notes of the same name, separated by a complete scale. We often distinguish between philosophical temperance and Christian temperance, or again between the philosophical poverty of Crates’ and the evangelical poverty of the disciples of Christ.

As St. Thomas remarks,¹³² acquired temperance has a rule and formal object different from those of infused temperance. Acquired temperance keeps a just medium in the matter of food in order that we may live reasonably, that we may not injure our health or the exercise of our reason. Infused temperance, on the contrary, keeps a superior happy mean in the use of food in order that we may live in a Christian manner, as children of God, en route to the wholly supernatural life of eternity. Infused temperance thus implies a more severe mortification than is implied by acquired temperance; it requires, as St. Paul says, that man chastise his body and bring it into subjection,¹³³ that he may become not only a virtuous citizen of society on earth, but one of the “fellow citizens with the saints, and the domestics of God.”¹³⁴

The same difference exists between the acquired virtue of religion, which ought to render to God, the Author of nature, the worship due Him, and the infused virtue of religion, which offers to God, the Author of grace, the essentially supernatural sacrifice of the Mass, which perpetuates in substance that of the cross. Between these two virtues of the same name, there is even more than the difference of an octave; there is a difference of orders, so that the acquired virtue of religion or that of temperance could grow forever by the repetition of acts without ever attaining the dignity of the slightest degree of the infused virtue of the same name. The tonality is entirely different; the spirit animating the word is no longer the same. In the case of the acquired virtue, the spirit is simply that of right reason; in the infused virtue, the spirit is that of faith which comes from God through grace.

These two formal objects and two motives of action differ greatly. Acquired prudence is ignorant of the supernatural motives of action; infused prudence knows them. Proceeding not from reason alone, but from reason illumined by infused faith, it knows the infinite elevation of our supernatural last end, God seen face to face. It knows, consequently, the gravity of mortal sin, the value of sanctifying grace and of the actual graces we must ask for every day in order to persevere, and the value of the sacraments that are to be received. Acquired prudence is ignorant of all of this, because this matter belongs to an essentially supernatural order.

What a difference there is between the philosophical modesty described by Aristotle and Christian humility! The latter presupposes the knowledge of two dogmas: that of creation ex nihilo, and that of the necessity of actual grace for taking the slightest step forward in the way of salvation. What a distance there is also between the virginity of the vestal virgin, whose duty it was to keep up the sacred fire, and that of the Christian virgin who consecrates her body and heart to God that she may follow our Lord Jesus Christ more perfectly!

These infused moral virtues are Christian prudence, justice, fortitude, temperance, and those which accompany them, such as meekness and humility. They are connected with charity in this sense, that charity, which sets us aright in regard to our supernatural last end, cannot exist without them, without this multiple rectification in regard to the supernatural means of salvation.¹³⁵ Moreover, he who loses charity by a mortal sin, loses the infused moral virtues; because, by turning away from the supernatural end, he loses infused rectification in regard to the means proportioned to this end. But it does not follow that he loses faith and hope, or that he loses the acquired virtues; the latter, however, cease to be stable and connected in him. In fact, a man who is in the state of mortal sin loves himself more than he does God and tends through egoism to fail in his duties even in the natural order.

The relations between these virtues and their subordination are explained by what we have just said.¹³⁶ First of all, the facility of virtuous acts is not assured in the same way by the infused moral virtues as by the acquired moral virtues. The infused virtues give an intrinsic facility, without always excluding the extrinsic obstacles; whereas these extrinsic obstacles are excluded by the repetition of acts that engender the acquired virtues.

This is easily understood when by sacramental absolution the infused moral virtues, united to sanctifying grace and to charity, are restored to a penitent who, though he has imperfect contrition for his sins, has not the acquired moral virtues. This happens, for example, in the case of a man who is accustomed to becoming intoxicated and who makes his Easter confession with sufficient attrition. By absolution he receives, together with charity, the infused moral virtues, including temperance; but he has not yet the acquired virtue of temperance. The infused virtue that he receives gives him a certain intrinsic facility for the exercise of the obligatory acts of sobriety; but this infused virtue does not exclude the extrinsic obstacles which would be eliminated by the repetition of the acts that engender acquired temperance.¹³⁷ This penitent ought also to watch seriously over himself in order to avoid the occasions that would cause him to fall back into his habitual sin. For this reason it is evident that the acquired virtue of temperance greatly facilitates the exercise of the infused virtue of the same name.¹³⁸

How are the virtues exercised? They are exercised simultaneously in such a way that the acquired virtue is subordinated to the infused virtue as a favorable disposition. Thus, in another domain, the agility of a pianist's or a harpist's fingers, which is acquired by a repetition of acts, favors the exercise of the musical art that is in the artist's intellect and not in his fingers. If he completely loses the nimbleness of his fingers as a result of paralysis, he can no longer exercise his art because of an extrinsic obstacle. His art, however, remains in his practical intellect, as we see in the case of a musical genius who is stricken with paralysis. Normally there ought to be two subordinated functions that should be exercised together. The same holds true for the acquired virtue and for the infused virtue of the same name.¹³⁹ In like manner the imagination is at the service of the intellect, and the memory at that of knowledge.

These moral virtues consist in a happy mean between two extremes, shown by excess on the one hand and deficiency on the other. Thus the virtue of fortitude inclines us to keep a happy mean between fear, which flees danger without a reasonable motive, and temerity, which would lead us into the danger of getting our head broken without sufficient reason. However, this happy mean may be misunderstood. Epicureans and the tepid intend to keep a happy mean not for love of virtue, but for convenience' sake in order to flee from the discomforts of the contrary vices. They confuse the happy mean with mediocrity, which is found not precisely between two contrary evils, but halfway between good and evil. Mediocrity or tepidity flees the higher good as an extreme to be avoided. It hides its laziness under this principle: "The best is sometimes the enemy of the good"; and it ends by saying: "The best is often, if not always, the enemy of the good." It thus ends by confusing the good with the mediocre.

The right happy medium of true virtue is not only a mean between two contrary vices; it is also a summit. It rises like a culminating point between these contrary deviations; thus fortitude is superior to fear and temerity; true prudence to imprudence and cunning; magnanimity to pusillanimity and vain and ambitious presumption; liberality to avarice or stinginess and prodigality; true religion to impiety and superstition.

Moreover, this happy medium, which is at the same time a summit, tends to rise without deviating to the right or the left in proportion as virtue grows. In this sense the mean of the infused virtue is superior to that of the corresponding acquired virtue, for it depends on a higher rule and has in view a more elevated object.

We note, lastly, that spiritual authors insist particularly, as the Gospel does, on certain moral virtues which have a more special relation with God and an affinity with the theological virtues. They are religion or solid piety,¹⁴⁰ penance,¹⁴¹ which render to God the worship and the reparation which are due to Him; meekness,¹⁴² united to patience, perfect chastity, virginity,¹⁴³ and humility,¹⁴⁴ a fundamental virtue which excludes pride, the principle of every sin. By abasing us before God, humility raises us above pusillanimity and pride and prepares us for the contemplation of divine things, for union with God. "God giveth grace to the humble,"¹⁴⁵ and He makes them humble in order to load them with His gifts. Christ delighted in saying: "Learn of Me, because I am meek and humble of heart."¹⁴⁶ He alone, who was so well established in truth, could speak of His humility without losing it.

Such are the infused and acquired moral virtues which, with the theological virtues to which they are subordinated, constitute our spiritual organism. This ensemble of functions possesses great harmony, although venial sin may more or less frequently introduce discordant notes in it. All the parts of this spiritual organism grow together, says St. Thomas, like the five fingers of one hand.¹⁴⁷ This proportionate growth demonstrates that a soul cannot have lofty charity without profound humility, just as the highest branch of a tree rises toward heaven in proportion as its roots plunge more deeply into the soil. We must take care in the interior life that nothing troubles the harmony of this spiritual organism, as happens unfortunately in those who, while perhaps remaining in the state of grace, seem more preoccupied with human learning or exterior relations than with growth in faith, confidence, and the love of God.

To form a right idea of the spiritual organism, it is not sufficient to know these virtues. We must consider the seven gifts of the Holy Ghost, and not ignore the diverse forms under which divine help is offered.

ARTICLE IV—THE SEVEN GIFTS OF THE HOLY GHOST

We shall recall what divine revelation, the traditional teaching of the Church, and the explanation of this teaching given by theologians, especially St. Thomas, teach us about the seven gifts of the Holy Ghost.

THE TEACHING OF SCRIPTURE

The revealed doctrine on the gifts of the Holy Ghost is contained principally in the classic text of Isaias (II: 2) which the fathers have often commented upon, saying that it is applied first of all to the Messias, and then by participation to all the just, to whom Christ promised to send the Holy Ghost. In this text, Isaias says in reference to the Messias: “And the Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon Him: the spirit of wisdom, and of understanding, the spirit of counsel, and of fortitude, the spirit of knowledge, and of godliness, and He shall be filled with the spirit of the fear of the Lord.”¹⁴⁸

In the Book of Wisdom we read also: “Wherefore I wished, and understanding was given me; and I called upon God, and the spirit of wisdom came upon me. And I preferred her before kingdoms and thrones.... Silver in respect to her shall be counted as clay. I loved her above health and beauty.... Now all good things came to me together with her.... I knew not that she was the mother of them all. Which I have learned without guile, and communicate without envy.... For she is an infinite treasure to men, which they that use, become the friends of God.... She reneweth all things, and through nations conveyeth herself into holy souls, she maketh the friends of God and prophets. For God loveth none but him that dwelleth with wisdom.”¹⁴⁹ This passage in itself shows that wisdom is the highest of the gifts of the Holy Ghost enumerated by Isaias.

This Old Testament revelation takes on its full meaning in the light of our Savior’s words: “If you love Me, keep My commandments. And I will ask the Father, and He shall give you another Paraclete, that He may abide with you forever. The spirit of truth... shall be in you.... The Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring all things to your mind, whatsoever I shall have said to you.”¹⁵⁰ To fortify the faithful against the promoters of heresy, St. John adds: “But you have the unction from the Holy One.... Let the unction, which you have received from Him, abide in you. And you have no need that any man teach you; but as His unction teacheth you of all things and is truth, and is no lie.”¹⁵¹ Moreover, Scripture contains texts commonly quoted as relating to each gift in particular.¹⁵²

TRADITION

In the course of time, the fathers of the Church often commented on these words of Scripture, and, beginning with the third century, tradition explicitly affirms that the seven gifts of the Holy Ghost are in all the just.¹⁵³ Pope St. Damasus, in 382, speaks of the sevenfold Spirit which rested on the Messias, and he enumerates the gifts.¹⁵⁴

St. Augustine, especially, explains this doctrine in his commentary on the Sermon on the Mount.¹⁵⁵ He shows the correspondence between the evangelical beatitudes and the seven gifts. Fear represents the first degree of the spiritual life; wisdom is its crown. Between these two extremes, St. Augustine distinguishes a double period of purifying preparation for wisdom: a remote preparation, by the active practice of the moral virtues corresponding to the gifts of piety, fortitude, knowledge, and counsel; then an immediate preparation, in which the soul is purified as a result of a more enlightened faith by the gift of understanding, of a firmer hope sustained by the gift of fortitude, and of a more ardent charity. The first preparation is called the active life; the second, the contemplative life,¹⁵⁶ because moral activity is here entirely subordinated to a faith rendered luminous by contemplation, which, in pacified and docile souls, will one day culminate in perfect wisdom.¹⁵⁷

To know the teaching of the Church on this subject we shall recall what the Council of Trent says: “The efficient cause [of our justification] is the merciful God who washes and sanctifies gratuitously (I Cor. 6: II), signing and anointing with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is the pledge of our inheritance (Eph. I: 13 f.).”¹⁵⁸

The Catechism of the Council of Trent fixes this point exactly by enumerating the seven gifts of the Holy Ghost according to Isaias (11: 2 f.), and by adding: “These gifts of the Holy Ghost are for us, as it were, a divine source whence we draw the living knowledge of the precepts of Christian life. Moreover, by them we can know whether the Holy Ghost dwells in us.”¹⁵⁹ St. Paul says, in fact: “For the Spirit Himself giveth testimony to our spirit, that we are the sons of God.”¹⁶⁰ He gives us this testimony by the filial love which He inspires in us, and by which He makes Himself, so to speak, felt by us.¹⁶¹

One of the most beautiful testimonies that tradition offers us on the seven gifts is found in the liturgy for Pentecost. We read in the sequence for the Mass of that day:

Veni sancte Spiritus,
Et entitle coelitus

Lucis tuae radium.

“Come, O Holy Ghost, and send from heaven a ray of Thy light. Come, Father of the poor. Come, Giver of graces. Come, Light of hearts, excellent Counselor, sweet Guest of our soul, sweet Refreshment, Rest in labor, Coolness in heat, Comfort in tears.”

O lux beatissima,
Reple cordis intima
Tuorum fidelium.

“O blessed Light, inundate the very depths of the hearts of Thy faithful.... Warm what is cold, straighten what is crooked.”

Da tuis fidelibus,
In te confidentibus,
Sacrum septenarium.

“Give to Thy faithful who trust in Thee, the sacred sevenfold gift. Give them the merit of virtue. Give them a happy end. Give them eternal joy.”

In the *Veni Creator Spiritus*, we read likewise:

Tu septiformis munere....
Accende lumen sensibus,
Infunde amorem cordibus.

“The sevenfold gift is Thine.... Kindle our senses with fire from above and pour Thy love into our hearts.”¹⁶²

Finally, the testimony of tradition is admirably expressed by the encyclical of Leo XIII on the Holy Ghost, in which the Pope declares that to complete our supernatural life we need the seven gifts of the Holy Ghost. He says:

“The just man, that is to say, he who lives the life of divine grace and acts by the fitting virtues as by means of faculties, has need of those seven gifts, which are properly attributed to the Holy Ghost. By means of them the soul is furnished and strengthened so as to be able to obey more easily and promptly His voice and impulse. Wherefore these gifts are of such efficacy that they lead the just man to the highest degree of sanctity; and of such excellence that they continue to exist even in heaven, though in a more perfect way. By means of these gifts the soul is excited and encouraged to seek after and attain the evangelical beatitudes which, like the flowers that come forth in the springtime, are the signs and harbingers of eternal beatitude....

These sublime truths, which so clearly show forth the infinite goodness of the Holy Ghost towards us, certainly demand that we should direct towards Him the highest homage of our love and devotion. Christians may do this most effectually if they will daily strive to know Him, to love Him, and to implore Him more earnestly.... What should be chiefly dwelt upon and clearly explained is the multitude and greatness of the benefits which have been bestowed, and are constantly bestowed, upon us by this divine Giver.... We owe to the Holy Ghost love, because He is God.... He is also to be loved because He is the substantial, eternal, primal Love, and nothing is more lovable than love.... In the second place it will obtain for us a still more abundant supply of heavenly gifts; for whilst a narrow heart contracts the hand of the giver, a grateful and mindful heart causes it to expand.... Lastly, we ought confidently and continually to beg of Him to illuminate us daily more and more with His light and inflame us with His charity: for, thus inspired with faith and love, we may press onward earnestly towards our eternal reward, since “He is the pledge of our inheritance.”¹⁶³

Such are the principal testimonies of tradition regarding the seven gifts of the Holy Ghost. We shall recall briefly the exact statements brought to bear on this point by theology, especially in the doctrine of St. Thomas. His teaching has been approved in substance by Leo XIII, who often quoted the Angelic Doctor in the encyclical, the principal parts of which we have just cited.

THE GIFTS OF THE HOLY GHOST ACCORDING TO ST. THOMAS

¹⁶⁴The holy doctor shows us three things in particular: that the gifts are habitual permanent dispositions (habitus) specifically distinct from the virtues; that the gifts are necessary to salvation; and that they are connected with charity and grow with it. St. Thomas says:

“To differentiate the gifts from the virtues, we must be guided by the way Scripture expresses itself, for we find there that the term employed is spirit rather than gift. For thus it is written (Isa. 11:2 f.): “The spirit... of wisdom and of understanding... shall rest upon Him,” and so on: from which words we are clearly given to understand that these seven are there set down as being in us by divine inspiration. Now inspiration denotes motion from without. For it must be noted that in man there is a twofold principle of movement, one within him, namely, the reason; the other extrinsic to him, namely, God, as stated above (Ia IIae, q. 9, a. 4. 6), and also by the Philosopher in the chapter on Good Fortune (Ethic. Eudem.,vii).

Now it is evident that whatever is moved must be proportionate to its mover: and the perfection of the thing moved as such consists in a disposition whereby the thing moved is made proportionate to its mover. Hence the more exalted the mover, the more perfect must be the disposition whereby the movable object is made proportionate to its mover: thus we see that a disciple needs a more perfect disposition in order to receive a higher teaching from his master. Now it is manifest that human virtues perfect man according as it is natural for him to be moved by his reason¹⁶⁵ in his interior and exterior actions. Consequently man needs yet higher perfections, whereby to be disposed to be moved by God. These perfections are called gifts, not only because they are infused by God, but also because by them man is disposed to become amenable to the divine inspiration,¹⁶⁶ according to Isa. I: 5: “The Lord... hath opened my ear, and I do not resist; I have not gone back.” Even the Philosopher says in the chapter on Good Fortune (Ethic. Eudem., loco cit.) that for those who are moved by divine instinct, there is no need to take counsel according to human reason, but only to follow their inner promptings, since they are moved by a principle higher than human reason. This, then, is what some say, that the gifts perfect man for acts which are higher than acts of virtue.¹⁶⁷

Thus we see that the gifts of the Holy Ghost are not acts, or actual motions, or passing helps of grace, but rather qualities or permanent infused dispositions (habitus),¹⁶⁸ which render a man promptly docile to divine inspirations. Leo XIII, in the encyclical *Divinum illud munus*, which we quoted at length a few pages back, placed his approval on this manner of conceiving of the gifts. They dispose man to obey the Holy Ghost promptly, as sails prepare a ship to follow the impulse of a favorable wind. By this passive docility, the gifts help us to produce those excellent works known as the beatitudes.¹⁶⁹ From this point of view, the saints are like great sailing vessels which, under full sail, properly catch the impelling force of the wind. The art of navigation teaches a mariner how and when he may most opportunely spread his sails to profit by a favorable breeze.

This figure is used by our Lord Himself when He says: “The Spirit breatheth where He will; and thou hearest His voice, but thou knowest not whence He cometh and whither He goeth. So is everyone that is born of the Spirit”¹⁷⁰ and is docile to His inspiration. St. Thomas says¹⁷¹ we do not really know where precisely the wind that blows was formed, or how far it will make itself felt. In the same way, we, do not know where precisely a divine inspiration begins, or to what degree of perfection it would lead us if we were wholly faithful to it. Let us not be like sailing vessels which, because of neglect in noting a favorable wind, have their sails furled when they should be spread.

According to these principles, the great majority of theologians hold with St. Thomas that the gifts are really and specifically distinct from the infused virtues, just as the principles which direct them are distinct: that is, the Holy Ghost and reason illumined by faith. We have here two regulating motions, two different rules that constitute different formal motives. It is a fundamental principle that habits are specified by their object and their formal motive, as sight by color and light, and hearing by sound. The human mode of acting results from the human rule; the superhuman mode results from the superhuman or divine rule, from the inspiration of the Holy Ghost, “modus a mensura causatur.”¹⁷² Thus even infused prudence proceeds by discursive deliberation, in which it differs from the gift of counsel, which disposes us to receive a special inspiration of a superdiscursive order.¹⁷³ Even infused prudence hesitates, for example, about what answer to give to an indiscreet question so as to avoid a lie and keep a secret; while a special inspiration of the Holy Ghost will enable us to find a proper reply, as Christ told His disciples.¹⁷⁴

Likewise, while faith adheres simply to revealed truths, the gift of understanding makes us scrutinize their depths, and that of wisdom makes us taste them. The gifts are thus specifically distinct from the virtues.¹⁷⁵

St. Thomas adds in his *Summa*¹⁷⁶ a statement that he had not made in his *Commentary on the Sentences*, namely, that the gifts of the Holy Ghost are necessary to salvation. The Book of Wisdom (7: 28) tells us in fact that: “God loveth none but him that dwelleth with wisdom”; and we read in Ecclesiasticus (I: 28): “He that is without fear (of God), cannot be justified.” Wisdom is the highest of the gifts, and fear the lowest.

Moreover, St. Thomas notes that even the infused virtues, both theological and moral, which are adapted to the human mode of our faculties, leave us in a state of inferiority in regard to our supernatural end which should be known in a more lively, more penetrating, more delightful manner, and toward which we ought to advance with greater ardor.¹⁷⁷

Even when faith is elevated, it remains essentially, imperfect for three reasons: (1) because of the obscurity of its object, which it does not attain immediately, but “through a glass in a dark manner” (I Cor. 13: 12); (2) it attains its object only by multiple dogmatic formulas, whereas God is supremely simple; (3) it attains its object in an abstract manner, by affirmative and negative propositions (componendo et dividendo), whereas, on the contrary, the living God is the light of life, whom we ought to be able to know, not in an abstract manner but in a quasi-experimental manner.¹⁷⁸ Hope shares the imperfection of faith, and so does charity as long as its object is proposed by faith.

With even greater reason, prudence, though infused, is imperfect from the fact that it must have recourse to reasoning, to the search for reasons for acting in order to direct the moral virtues. It frequently hesitates, for example, about a suitable answer to

give to an indiscreet question so as to keep a secret and avoid a lie. In certain cases, only a good inspiration would be necessary to do so. The same thing is true when it is a case of efficaciously resisting certain temptations, either subtle, or violent and prolonged.

“Human reason,” says St. Thomas, “even when perfected by the theological virtues, does not know all things, or all possible things. Consequently it is unable to avoid folly (stultitia) and other like things.... God, however, to whose knowledge and power all things are subject, by His motion safeguards us from all folly, ignorance, dullness of mind, hardness of heart, and the rest. Consequently the gifts of the Holy Ghost, which make us docile to His promptings, are said to be given as remedies for these defects.”¹⁷⁹

In this sense they are necessary to salvation, as sails are on a vessel that it may be responsive to a favorable wind, although it may advance also by means of oars. These two ways of advancing are quite distinct, although they may be united or simultaneous.

“By the theological and moral virtues,” says St. Thomas, “man is not so perfected in respect of his last end as not to stand in continual need of being moved by the yet higher promptings of the Holy Ghost.”¹⁸⁰ This need is permanent in man; for this reason the gifts are in us a permanent, infused disposition.¹⁸¹

We make use of the gifts somewhat as we do of the virtue of obedience in order to receive a superior direction with docility and to act according to this direction; but we do not have this superior inspiration whenever we wish.¹⁸² In this sense by means of the gifts we are passive in regard to the Holy Ghost that we may act under His influence. This will explain more clearly why, like obedience, the gifts are a permanent disposition in the just man.¹⁸³

This great fitness, and even this necessity of the gifts, is better seen if we consider the perfection which each of them gives either to the intellect, or to the will and to the sensible part of the soul, as St. Thomas points out.¹⁸⁴

The following synopsis explains the statement just made:

		GIFT OF:			
The gifts perfect	the understanding enlightened by faith	for the penetration of truth	understanding	faith	
		to judge	divine things	wisdom	charity
			created things	knowledge	hope
			our actions	counsel	prudence
	the will and the sensitive appetites	relative to worship due to God	piety	religion	
		against the fear of danger	fortitude		
		against disorderly concupiscences	fear	temperance	

Corresponding virtues

We see that those gifts which direct the others are superior; among them the gift of wisdom is the highest because it gives us a quasi experimental knowledge of God, and thereby, a judgment about divine things which is superior even to the penetration of the gift of understanding (which belongs rather to first apprehension than to judgment).

The gift of knowledge corresponds to hope in this sense, that it makes us see the emptiness of created things and of human help, and consequently the necessity of placing our confidence in God in order to attain to the possession of Him. The gift of fear also perfects hope by preserving us from presumption; but it corresponds also to temperance to aid us against temptations.¹⁸⁵ To these seven gifts correspond the beatitudes which are their acts, as St. Thomas so well shows.¹⁸⁶

Finally, from the necessity of the gifts for salvation it follows that they are connected with charity, according to St. Paul's words to the Romans (5: 5): "The charity of God is poured forth in our hearts by the Holy Ghost, who is given to us." The Holy Ghost does not come to us without His seven gifts, which thus accompany charity and which, consequently, are lost with it by mortal sin.

They thus belong to the spiritual organism of sanctifying grace, which is therefore called “the grace of the virtues and the gifts.”¹⁸⁷ Since all the infused virtues grow together like the five fingers of the hand,¹⁸⁸ the same must be said of the seven gifts. Hence we cannot conceive of a Christian having that high degree of charity which is proper to perfection, without at the same time having the gifts of the Holy Ghost in a proportionate degree, although perhaps in him the gifts of understanding and of wisdom may be exercised under a less contemplative and more practical form than in others. This was the case with St. Vincent de Paul and many other saints who were called to devote themselves to their neighbor in the works of the active life.¹⁸⁹

We shall treat later of docility to the Holy Ghost and of the conditions it demands,¹⁹⁰ but we see even now the value of this spiritual organism, which is eternal life begun in us. This life is more precious than sight, than physical life, than the use of reason, in this sense, that the loss of the use of reason does not deprive the just man of this treasure, which death itself cannot snatch from us. This grace of the virtues and gifts is also more precious than the gift of miracles or of tongues or of prophecy; for these charismata are, so to speak, only exterior, supernatural signs, which can point out the way that leads to God, but cannot unite us to Him as sanctifying grace and charity can.¹⁹¹

To see more clearly how the diverse functions of this spiritual organism should be exercised, we must speak of the actual grace necessary to the exercise of the virtues and the gifts.¹⁹²

APPENDIX—THE SUPERHUMAN MODE OF THE GIFTS OF THE HOLY GHOST

Since we have treated this question of the superhuman mode of the gifts of the Holy Ghost in other works,¹⁹³ we shall briefly recall the exact meaning of what we have previously written on this point and add some new and exact statements.

IN WHAT SENSE CAN THE GIFTS HAVE TWO MODES, THAT ON EARTH AND THAT OF HEAVEN?

We have several times recalled this incontestable truth, namely, that one habitus can have acts whose formal object is distinct from that of the habitus, and we have admitted that in the specifying object of the habitus two different modes of acting may be found, as, for example, in the case of the infused virtues and the gifts, their mode of acting here on earth and their mode in heaven. But we have emphasized the fact that one and the same habitus cannot be the principle of acts that have distinct modes, such as that of earth and that of heaven, unless the first mode is ordained to the second and thus falls under one and the same formal object.

A recent work offering an entirely contrary opinion¹⁹⁴ states that the gifts of the Holy Ghost would, according to St. Thomas, have even here on earth two specifically distinct modes, the one ordinary, the other essentially extraordinary; the latter would be required for the infused contemplation of the mysteries of faith. Consequently contemplation would not be in the normal way of sanctity.

We replied to this opinion.¹⁹⁵ The essence of our reply, which should not be overlooked, was as follows: “If there were here

on earth two specifically distinct modes for the gifts of the Holy Ghost, one of which would be ordinary, and the other not only eminent, but intrinsically and extrinsically extraordinary, the act characterized by the human mode would not be ordained to the act characterized by a superhuman and essentially extraordinary mode. (It would not be ordained to it any more than to the acts which suppose graces *gratis datae*, such as prophecy.) On the contrary, the act of the gifts exercised on earth is essentially ordained to that of heaven. They are, as St. Thomas insisted in the *Quaestiones disputatae*, ‘in eadem serie motus,’ in the same series of operations, and the last must be placed, otherwise all that precede fail to attain their end.

“This text from the *Quaestiones disputatae*¹⁹⁶, in no way contradicts what we have said. It does not state that the seven gifts of the Holy Ghost have on earth two specifically distinct acts, one ordinary, the other essentially extraordinary. It states quite the contrary; for it demands that for one and the same habitus the less perfect act should be ordained to the second, just as the foundation of a building is to the superstructure, as Christian life on earth is to that of heaven.” We even underlined (*ibid.*, p. 76) in the text of St. Thomas invoked against our opinion, the word *ordinetur*, which the writer had neglected to consider.

R. Dalbiez, writing in the *Etudes Carmelitaines*, April, 1933 (pp. 250 ff.), made the same observation that we did. He placed in parallel columns the integral text of St. Thomas and the quotation that Father Chrysogonus had taken from it, although the latter failed to cite these significant words: “Si autem non accipiat unum in ordine ad aliud, tunc non erunt eadem virtutes, nec secundum actum nec secundum habitum.”¹⁹⁷ Father Dalbiez adds (*ibid.*): “The passage which I have underlined and which Father Chrysogonus did not quote is quite unfavorable to his thesis.... The idea of finding in this so-called definitive text the slightest support for the thesis of the two modes, human and superhuman, of the terrestrial acts of the gifts of the Holy Ghost must be abandoned.”

P. Perinelle, in the *Revue des sciences philosophiques et theologiques*, November, 1932 (p. 692), makes a like observation on the central argument of the thesis. He adds that Father Chrysogonus was mistaken in saying that according to St. Thomas there are three infused intellectual virtues (understanding, knowledge, and wisdom) parallel to the gifts of the Holy Ghost, and that it is only since the Fall that the gifts are necessary.

What most interests us here is that the author did not at all succeed in proving the principal point that he wished to establish: namely, that the gifts have here below two specifically distinct modes of operating, one ordinary, the other essentially extraordinary, which would characterize infused contemplation.

WHETHER THE SUPERHUMAN MODE OF THE GIFTS CAN BE LATENT

We have often affirmed that ordinarily the superhuman mode of the gifts is at first quite hidden, that is, in the ascetical life, and that this mode becomes more manifest in the mystical life, at least for an experienced director.¹⁹⁸ We may express this teaching more exactly by stating that in the ascetical life the influence of the gifts is either latent and quite frequent (it makes one think of the breeze which only facilitates the work of the rowers), or manifest but rare (in certain striking circumstances), whereas, on the contrary, in the mystical life the influence of the gifts is both frequent and manifest. It is not, however, always striking, as in the case of the great contemplatives, but occasionally diffuse, very real nevertheless, as is the case in saints who have an active vocation, such as St. Vincent de Paul.¹⁹⁹

Some may object: “The operation belonging to the superhuman mode could not remain hidden; the soul necessarily perceives it from the very fact that this operation deviates from the natural mode of the subject.” This assertion springs from the preceding one which, we have seen, has not been proved. It would be true if the gifts had here on earth two specifically distinct modes, and if the superhuman mode were extraordinary to the point of requiring infused ideas or a manifestly supernatural arrangement of our acquired ideas. But this is not so. Even in the case of prophecy, which is an extraordinary grace, there may be, says St. Thomas, a prophetic instinct hidden even from him who receives it; by it he can, like Caiaphas, prophesy without knowing it. “The prophet’s mind is instructed by God in two ways: in one way by an express revelation, in another way by a most mysterious instinct ‘to which the human mind is subjected without knowing it,’ as Augustine says (Gen. ad lit., II, 17).”²⁰⁰

Since this is true for prophecy, which is an essentially extraordinary grace, with even greater reason is it true of the special inspiration of the Holy Ghost, to which the gifts, present in all the just, should render them docile. All spiritual writers admit that this special inspiration, which resembles the breeze that comes up at the right moment, is ordinarily latent and almost imperceptible at first, and that, if it is not resisted, it generally becomes stronger and more urgent. Innumerable passages from Scripture, from the fathers, from St. Thomas, and St. John of the Cross could be quoted on this point. They make this statement in particular when commenting on Christ’s words: “The Spirit breatheth where He will, and thou hearest His voice; but thou knowest not whence He cometh and whither He goeth: so is everyone that is born of the Spirit.”²⁰¹ The inspiration, at first latent and obscure, becomes more manifest, luminous, and compelling if one is faithful.

St. John of the Cross expresses the same idea in *The Ascent of Mount Carmel*: “It is indispensable to possess this knowledge proper to contemplation before leaving discursive meditation. But it is to be remembered that this general knowledge... is at times so subtle and delicate, particularly when most pure, simple, perfect, spiritual, and interior, that the

soul, though in the practice thereof, is not observant or conscious of it.”²⁰²

The special inspiration which we should receive with docility through the gifts of the Holy Ghost is undoubtedly often quite hidden. According to spiritual writers, we must establish ourselves in silence that we may be attentive to this inspiration, hear it, and then distinguish between it and one that might lead us astray. This is the whole question of the discernment of spirits. This admonition is frequently expressed in *The Imitation of Christ*: “Consider these things, O my soul, and close up the doors of thy sensual desires; that thou mayest hear what the Lord thy God speaketh within thee.”²⁰³ Moreover, there are certainly many degrees of docility to the Holy Ghost, from our first response to the attraction of our vocation up to the last moment when we give up our souls to God.

ARE THERE DEGREES IN DETACHMENT FROM CREATURES?

Is detachment from creatures the same for the greatest saints and for souls that have reached a lesser perfection? To formulate the question is to solve it; we have never had the slightest doubt on this point.

One must be possessed of a certain juvenile daring to write: “Detachment from creatures ought to be the same for all perfect souls: that is, total, absolute, universal. It is impossible to find a mean between having and not having defects. Now perfection by its nature excludes all defects, whether directly or indirectly voluntary. The interior fervor exercised in detaching oneself from everything will vary in the subject according to the degree of the grace received, which is the seed of more or less striking victories; but objectively speaking, the renunciation of everything, no matter how small, which is opposed to the divine will, must be total and without any exception.”

The logical formalism which halts at the formula: “It is impossible to find a mean between having and not having defects,” ought not to make us forget the concrete order of things, or the great difference that exists among perfect souls, from the least elevated up to the holy soul of Christ. In concrete reality, renunciation, even objectively considered, progresses together with the fervor of will of the subject in which it exists. In fact, an already perfect soul can undeniably still progress, and in that soul detachment from creatures increases with union with God. These are two aspects of the progress of the life of grace, which continues in the unitive way. Thus many indirectly voluntary defects, the result of a practically unheeded negligence, are progressively eliminated in proportion as the depth of the soul is purified and more intimately and continually united to God.

Moreover, it is certain that a just man, even though perfect, cannot continually avoid all venial sins, although he can avoid each venial sin in particular. As he grows in charity, he avoids them more and more, so that in the transforming union, as St. Teresa explains,²⁰⁴ the soul is practically freed from the trouble of the passions; as long as it is under the actual grace of the transforming union, it does not commit deliberate venial sins. Outside of these moments, it may still commit some venial fault, which is quickly atoned for. Though some perfect souls are confirmed in good, this is not true of all of them.

Finally, we must not forget that detachment from creatures was far greater in the Blessed Virgin than in the greatest saints, since she never committed the slightest venial sin. It was even greater still in the holy soul of Christ, who not only never actually sinned, but who was, even here on earth, absolutely impeccable. Therefore it is truly an exaggeration of simplicity to say: “It is impossible to find a mean between having and not having defects.” What is true, is that there is no mean between being or not being absolutely impeccable, between continually avoiding or not avoiding every venial sin, between wishing or not wishing to strive henceforth to avoid them more and more. According to St. Thomas, “man (poenitens) needs to have the purpose of taking steps to commit fewer venial sins.”²⁰⁵ According as his will is more or less intense or fervent, he will actually avoid them more or less. Detachment from creatures will increase with the progress of charity or of attachment to God. Father Chardon strongly insisted on this point in his beautiful book, *La croix de Jesus*.

From all evidence, there are many degrees in what St. Thomas expresses in this manner: “Perfection can be had in this life... by the removal from man’s affections not only of whatever is contrary to charity, but also of whatever hinders the mind’s affections from tending wholly to God.”²⁰⁶ In this detachment there are many degrees even in regard to the exclusion of venial sins: “Those who are perfect in this life are said to offend in many things with regard to venial sins, which result from a weakness of the present life.”²⁰⁷ This statement is not exaggerated in its simplicity; it is rather the simple expression of Christian good sense.²⁰⁸

ARE THE PASSIVE PURIFICATIONS NECESSARY TO ELIMINATE MORAL DEFECTS?

Our opponent writes in one of his replies: “We think that the defects pointed out by St. John of the Cross in *The Dark Night* under the name of capital sins, are all voluntary and that consequently the soul can, with the help of ordinary grace, free itself from them. Does Father Garrigou-Lagrange believe that the soul cannot purify itself of spiritual gluttony, spiritual laziness, spiritual pride, and other defects of this type... by the exercise of asceticism? We repeat here what we wrote elsewhere: that, if it could not free itself from them, these defects would no longer be voluntary and consequently would not hinder perfection.”

We answer that St. Thomas avoids this excessively simple and superficial manner of considering things, when he teaches the

necessity of the gifts of the Holy Ghost and of the corresponding inspirations for salvation and perfection.²⁰⁹ We have seen in the course of this study that he by no means admits that the gifts would have here on earth two specifically distinct modes, one ordinary, the other essentially extraordinary, such as that of graces *gratis datae*.

The soul can free itself of certain moral defects only by docility to the special inspirations of the Holy Ghost. It would be entirely false to say that if the soul cannot deliver itself from them without these special inspirations, “these defects are no longer voluntary and therefore do not hinder perfection.” The gifts of the Holy Ghost are given to all the just precisely to enable them to receive with docility these special inspirations, whose superhuman mode, that is at first latent, grows progressively more manifest if the soul is docile. St. Thomas says in fitting terms: “Whether we consider human reason as perfected in its natural perfection, or as perfected by the theological virtues, it does not know all things, or all possible things. Consequently it is unable to avoid folly and other like things mentioned in the objection. God, however, to whose knowledge and power all things are subject, by His motion safeguards us from all folly, ignorance, dullness of mind, and hardness of heart, and the rest. Consequently the gifts of the Holy Ghost, which make us amenable to His promptings, are said to be given as remedies for these defects.”²¹⁰

We hold, therefore, that the special inspirations of the Holy Ghost are necessary that the soul may be purified of a certain rudeness or harshness, of dullness, of spiritual folly, and other similar defects, which are not only opposed to a certain psychological purity, but to moral purity. Without progressive docility to these special inspirations of the Holy Ghost, the depth of the soul will not be purified of its more or less unconscious egoism which mingles, under the form of indirectly voluntary negligence, in many of our acts and in many more or less culpable omissions.

To say that the passive purifications are not necessary to perfect moral purity would be to deny the necessity of the passive purification of the will, which frees the acts of hope and charity from all human alloy.²¹¹ In this connection we may profitably recall what St. Teresa wrote in her Life: “For instance, they read that we must not be troubled when men speak ill of us, that we are to be then more pleased than when they speak well of us; that we must despise our own good name, be detached from our kindred,... with many other things of the same kind. The disposition to practice this must be, in my opinion, the gift of God; for it seems to me a supernatural good.”²¹² The meaning which the saint gives to this last expression is well known. Moreover, she remarks more than once that the progress of the virtues normally accompanies that of prayer, and that profound humility is ordinarily the fruit of the infused contemplation of the infinite grandeur of God and of our own wretchedness. This growth in virtue is not something accidental; it is the normal development of the interior life.

St. John of the Cross clearly holds that the passive purifications are necessary for the profound purity of the will. It will suffice to recall what he says of the defects that necessitate the passive purification of the senses and that of the spirit. In *The Dark Night of the Soul* (Bk. I, chaps. 2–9, and Bk. II, chaps. I f.) he speaks, especially in the last two chapters named, of the “stains of the old man” which still remain in the spirit, like rust which will disappear only under the action of an intense fire. Among the defects of proficients which require “the strong lye of the night of the spirit,” he mentions rudeness, impatience, secret pride, unconscious egoism which causes some souls to use spiritual goods in anything but a detached manner, with the result that they fall into illusions. Evidently they lack not only psychological but moral purity. Finally, in the opinion of St. John of the Cross, these passive purifications (which belong to the mystical order) and infused contemplation of the mysteries of faith are indubitably in the normal way of sanctity since he wrote the two following propositions, which are of primary importance in his work: “The passive purification of the senses is common, it takes place in the greater number of beginners”; being passive, it belongs not to the ascetical but to the mystical order.²¹³ “The soul began to set out on the way of the spirit, the way of proficients, which is also called the illuminative way, or the way of infused contemplation, wherein God Himself teaches and refreshes the soul”²¹⁴ St. John of the Cross most certainly wished to note here not something accidental, but something that is produced normally in the way of sanctity when a soul that is truly docile to the Holy Ghost does not recoil in the face of trial.

We maintain, therefore, what we have always taught on this point. Moreover, the Carmelite theologians have taught the same doctrine. Philip of the Blessed Trinity²¹⁵ and Anthony of the Holy Ghost²¹⁶ state very clearly: “All ought to aspire to supernatural contemplation. All, and especially souls consecrated to God, ought to aspire and to tend to the actual union of enjoyment with God.” (These theologians assign the same meaning to the words “supernatural” and “infused” when they apply them to contemplation.)

Finally, as we have more than once remarked, Joseph of the Holy Ghost wrote: “If infused contemplation is taken in the sense of rapture, ecstasy, or similar favors, we cannot apply ourselves to it, or ask it of God, or desire it; but as for infused contemplation in itself, as an act of contemplation (abstraction being made of ecstasy which may accidentally accompany it), we can aspire to it, desire it ardently, and humbly ask it of God, although we cannot certainly endeavor to have it by our own industry or our own activity.”²¹⁷ Joseph of the Holy Ghost even says: “God usually raises to infused contemplation the soul that exercises itself fervently in acquired contemplation. This is the common teaching.”²¹⁸

We have never taught anything else. This is truly the teaching of St. John of the Cross, and it conforms fully to that left us by

St. Thomas on the seven gifts of the Holy Ghost, which are connected with charity and which, as infused habits, grow with charity. The full perfection of Christian life is inconceivable without them and without the special inspirations to which they render us docile.

ARTICLE V—ACTUAL GRACE AND ITS DIVERS FORMS

We shall recall here:(1) the necessity of actual grace; (2) its divers forms; and(3) the general nature of fidelity to grace.

THE NECESSITY OF ACTUAL GRACE

Even in the natural order, no created agent acts or operates without the cooperation of God, first Mover of bodies and spirits. In this sense, St. Paul says in his discourse on the Areopagus: “Although He (God) be not far from every one of us; for in Him we live and move and are.”²¹⁹ With even greater reason in the supernatural order, that we may produce acts of the infused virtues and of the gifts, we need a divine motion, which is called actual grace. It is a truth of faith defined against the Pelagians and the Semi-Pelagians,²²⁰ that, without this grace, we can neither dispose ourselves positively to conversion, nor persevere for a notable time in good, nor above all persevere until death. Without actual grace, we cannot produce the slightest salutary act, or, with even greater reason, reach perfection. This is what Christ meant when He said to His disciples: “Without Me you can do nothing.”²²¹ St. Paul adds with regard to the order of salvation: “Not that we are sufficient to think anything of ourselves, as of ourselves,”²²² and that “It is God who worketh in you both to will and to accomplish,”²²³ by actualizing our liberty without violating it. It is He who gives us to dispose ourselves to habitual grace and to act meritoriously. When He crowns our merits, it is still His gifts that He crowns, says St. Augustine. The Church has often recalled this idea in her councils.²²⁴

This explains why we must always pray. The necessity of prayer is founded on the necessity of actual grace. Except for the first grace, which is gratuitously given to us without our praying for it, since it is the very principle of prayer, it is a thoroughly established truth that prayer is the normal, efficacious, and universal means by which God wishes that we should obtain all the actual graces we need. This is why our Lord inculcates so often the necessity of prayer to obtain grace. He says: “Ask, and it shall be given you: seek, and you shall find: knock, and it shall be opened to you. For everyone that asketh, receiveth: and he that seeketh, findeth: and to him that knocketh, it shall be opened.”²²⁵ He recalls this necessity of prayer to obtain actual grace, especially when temptation is to be resisted: “Watch ye, and pray that ye enter not into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.”²²⁶ In prayer we ought to recognize that God is the Author of all good; and therefore all confidence not founded on prayer is presumptuous.²²⁷

Therefore the Council of Trent declares in St. Augustine’s own words: “God never commands the impossible, but in commanding He tells us to do what we can, to ask for that which we are not able to do, and He helps us in order that we may be able.”²²⁸ By His actual grace He even helps us to pray. There are, consequently, actual graces which we can obtain only by prayer.²²⁹

We could not insist too strongly on this point, for many beginners, unwittingly impregnated with practical naturalism, as the Pelagians and the Semi-Pelagians were, imagine that everything can be attained with will and energy, even without actual grace. Experience soon shows them the profound truth of Christ’s words: “Without Me you can do nothing,” and also that of St. Paul’s statement: “It is God who worketh in you both to will and to accomplish.” Therefore we must ask Him for the actual grace ever more faithfully to keep the commandments, especially the supreme precept of the love of God and of our neighbor.

THE DIFFERENT ACTUAL GRACES

Actual grace, the necessity of which we have just recalled, presents itself under many forms which it is highly useful to know in the spiritual life. It will be well at this point to review the principles as clearly as possible, without failing to recognize the mystery they express. It is one of the most remarkable partly clear and partly obscure mysteries of Christian doctrine.

Actual grace is often given to us as a light or interior illumination. For example, while reading the Epistle or Gospel of the day at Mass, an interior light is given to us that we may better grasp its meaning. We are struck by these words of Christ to the Samaritan woman: “If thou didst know the gift of God,”²³⁰ or by those of St. Paul: “The Son of God, who loved me, and delivered Himself for me,”²³¹ and we consider that He continues to offer Himself for us in the Mass and that, if we wish, He will give Himself to us, especially in Holy Communion. This light constitutes a grace of interior illumination.²³² It is followed by a grace of inspiration and attraction, for, in thinking of the generous and disinterested love of the Savior, we feel ourselves strongly led to return Him love for love. This is an actual grace which acts on the will and leads to love and to action. At times it even brings one to will to give oneself fully to God, to suffer, and if need be, to die for Him. Then it is not only a grace of attraction, but a grace of strength, which, though often received without our being at all aware of it, makes it possible for us in

aridity to endure and to wait²³³

How does actual grace, which moves the will, influence it? It does this in two ways: either by proposing to it an object which attracts it, or by a motion or interior impulse which God alone can give.²³⁴ God can evidently incline our will toward good by proposing an object to it, for example, by the promise of eternal beatitude, or of progress in love. Thus a mother inclines the will of her child to good, either by proposing to him a sensible object which attracts him, or by persuading him to conduct himself in a becoming manner. Our guardian angels can do this also by suggesting good thoughts to us. What God alone can do, is to move our will to good by an interior motion or impulse, for He is closer to us than we are to ourselves. He preserves in existence our soul and our faculties, of which He is the Author; and, without doing violence to them, He can move them from within according to their natural inclination by giving us a new energy. An example will help to make this understood: In order to teach her child to walk, a mother takes hold of him under his arms and helps him not only with her voice by showing him an object to attain, but by her gesture; by lifting him up. What the mother does thus in the corporeal order, God can do in the spiritual order. He can lift up, not only our body but our will itself, to lead it to good. He is the very Author of our will; He has given it its fundamental inclination to good, and in consequence He alone can move it from within according to this inclination. He acts thus in us, in the very inmost depths of our will, to make us will and act. The more urgently we ask Him to do this, the more strongly does He act to increase in us the love that we should have for Him.

Moreover, actual grace is called prevenient grace when it arouses a good thought or good feeling in us, when we have done nothing to excite it in ourselves. If we do not resist this grace, God adds to it a helping or concomitant grace, which will assist our will to produce the salutary act demanded and to realize our good designs. Thus, as St. Paul says: "God works in us both to will and to accomplish."

Finally, we must note that God sometimes moves us to act by deliberation according to the human mode, and at other times by special inspiration to act in a superior manner without deliberation on our part. The following is an example of the first case: I see that the habitual hour to recite the Rosary has come, and of my own accord I am led by deliberation to recite it. I do so under the influence of a common actual grace, called cooperating, for it cooperates in my action according to the human mode of deliberation.

The second mode may be illustrated by the following example: It may happen that in an unexpected way while doing absorbing work, I receive a special inspiration to say a short prayer, and I immediately do it. This special inspiration is called an operating grace, for it operates in us without deliberation on our part, not however without vital, free, and meritorious consent.²³⁵ In the first manner, God generally moves us to act according to the human mode of the virtues; in the second manner, He moves us to act according to the superhuman mode of the gifts of the Holy Ghost. Our ship then advances no longer solely by dint of rowing, but by the superior impulse of a favorable wind.

²³⁶All that we have said about the different modes of divine motion may be summed up in the following table, which should be read upward.

God
moves
our
mind
and our
will

in the
supernatural
order

in the natural
order

- above deliberation, by special inspiration to which the gifts of the Holy Ghost render us docile
- after deliberation, to will a definite act of a specific infused virtue, for example, of religion directed by prudence.
- before deliberation, to will efficaciously the supernatural last end
- above deliberation, by special inspiration, for example, in poetic order
- after deliberation, to will a definite act of a specified acquired virtue.
- before deliberation, to will good in general and happiness.

Under operating grace, we are more passive than active, and our activity consists especially in consenting freely to the operation of God, in allowing ourselves to be led by the Holy Ghost, in promptly and generously following His inspirations.²³⁷ But even under cooperating grace all our salutary action is from God as from the First Cause, and it is all from us as from the second cause.

FIDELITY TO GRACE

Fidelity to grace is of the utmost importance, and especially so is increasing fidelity to the actual grace of the present moment, that we may correspond to the duty of that moment, which manifests the will of God in our regard. St. Augustine says: “God who created you without yourself, will not sanctify you without yourself.”²³⁸ Our consent is needed and likewise our obedience to the precepts. God’s help is given us, he says again, not that our will should do nothing, but that it may act in a salutary and meritorious manner. Actual grace is constantly offered to us for the accomplishment of the duty of the present moment, just as air comes constantly into our lungs to permit us to breathe. As we must inhale in order to draw into our lungs the air which renews our blood, so we must will to receive with docility the grace which renews our spiritual energies in the journey toward God. A person who does not inhale will die of asphyxiation; he who does not receive grace with docility will eventually die of spiritual asphyxiation. This is why St. Paul says: “And we helping do exhort you that you receive not the grace of God in vain.”²³⁹ We must correspond with it and cooperate generously with it. Were this elementary truth put into practice daily, it would lead to sanctity.

Without a doubt, God takes the first step toward us by His prevenient grace, then He helps us to consent to it. He accompanies us in all our ways and difficulties, even to the moment of death. On our part, we should not forget that, instead of resisting His prevenient graces, we should be faithful to them. How can we do this? First of all, we can do so by joyfully welcoming the first illuminations of grace, then by following its inspirations with docility in spite of obstacles, and finally by putting these inspirations into practice no matter what the cost. Then we shall cooperate in the work of God, and our action will be the fruit of His grace and of our free will. It will be entirely from God as First Cause, and entirely from us as second cause.

The first grace of light, which efficaciously produces a good thought in us, is sufficient in relation to a voluntary good consent, in this sense, that it gives us, not this act, but the power to produce it. However, if we resist this good thought, we deprive ourselves of the actual grace which would have efficaciously led us to a good consent. Resistance falls on sufficient grace like hail on a tree in bloom which promised much fruit; the flowers are destroyed and the fruit will not form. Efficacious grace is offered us in sufficient grace, as the fruit is in the flower; moreover, the flower must not be destroyed if the fruit is to be given to us. If we do not resist sufficient grace, actual efficacious grace is given us, and by it we advance surely in the way of salvation. Sufficient grace thus leaves us without excuse before God, and efficacious grace does not allow us to glory in ourselves; with it we advance humbly and generously.²⁴⁰

We should not resist the divine prevenient graces of Him who has given us sanctifying grace, the infused virtues, the gifts, and who daily draws us to Himself. We should not be content with living a mediocre life and with producing only imperfect fruits, since our Savior came that we “may have life, and may have it more abundantly,”²⁴¹ and that from within us “shall flow rivers of living water,”²⁴² that we may eternally enjoy His beatitude. God is magnanimous; let us, too, be so.

This fidelity is required, first of all, that we may preserve the life of grace by avoiding mortal sin. The life of grace is incomparably more precious than that of the body, than the power to perform miracles; it is of such worth that our Savior delivered Himself up to death in order to restore it to us. If we were given to us to contemplate unveiled the amazing splendor of

sanctifying grace, we should be ravished. Moreover, fidelity is required to merit and obtain the increase of the life of grace, which ought to grow until our entrance into heaven, since we are travelers on the road to eternity and since we advance toward our goal by growing in the love of God. Thence comes the necessity of sanctifying each and every one of our acts, even the most ordinary, by accomplishing them with purity of intention, for a supernatural motive, and in union with our Lord. If we were thus faithful from morning until evening, each of our days would contain hundreds of meritorious acts, hundreds of acts of love of God and of neighbor, made on every pleasant or painful occasion, and when evening came, our union with God would be more intimate and much stronger. It has often been said that to sanctify ourselves there is no more practical and more efficacious means that is more within the reach of all, than thus to supernaturalize each of our acts by offering them in union with our Lord, to God for His glory and the good of souls.^{[243](#)}

The Blessed Trinity Present in Us, Uncreated Source of our Interior Life

Since we have treated of the life of grace, of the spiritual organism of the infused virtues and the gifts, we may fittingly consider the uncreated Source of our interior life, that is, the Blessed Trinity present in all just souls on earth, in purgatory, and in heaven. We shall see, first of all, what divine revelation, contained in Scripture, tells us about this consoling mystery. We shall then briefly consider the testimony of tradition, and finally we shall see the exact ideas offered by theology, particularly by St. Thomas Aquinas,²⁴⁴ and the spiritual consequences of this doctrine.

THE TESTIMONY OF SCRIPTURE

Scripture teaches us that God is present in every creature by a general presence, often called the presence of immensity. We read in particular in Ps. 138:7: "Whither shall I go from Thy Spirit? Or whither shall I flee from Thy face? If I ascend into heaven, Thou art there; if I descend into hell, Thou art present." This is what made St. Paul say, when preaching to the Athenians: "God, who made the world,... being Lord of heaven and earth,... though He be not far from everyone of us: for in Him we live and move and are."²⁴⁵ God, in fact, sees all, preserves all things in existence, and inclines every creature to the action which is suitable for him. He is like the radiant source from which the life of creation springs, and also the central force that draws everything to itself: "O God, sustaining force of creation, remaining in Thyself, unmoved."

Holy Scripture does not, however, speak only of this general presence of God in all things; it also speaks of a special presence of God in the just. We read, in fact, even in the Old Testament: "Wisdom will not enter into a malicious soul, nor dwell in a body subject to sins."²⁴⁶ Would only created grace or the created gift of wisdom dwell in the just soul? Christ's words bring us a new light and show us that it is the divine persons Themselves who come and dwell in us: "If anyone love Me," He says, "he will keep My word. And My Father will love him, and We will come to him, and will make Our abode with him."²⁴⁷ These words should be noted: "We will come." Who will come? Would it be only created effects: sanctifying grace, the infused virtues, the gifts? No indeed; Those who come are Those who love: the divine persons, the Father and the Son, from whom the Holy Ghost is never separated, that Spirit of Love promised, moreover, by our Lord and visibly sent on Pentecost. "We will come to him," to the just soul who loves God, and "We will come" not only in a transitory, passing manner, but "We will make our abode with him," that is to say, We will dwell in him as long as he remains just, or in the state of grace, as long as he preserves charity. Such were our Lord's own words.

These words are confirmed by those that promise the Holy Ghost: "I will ask the Father, and He shall give you another Paraclete, that He may abide "with you forever, the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive because it seeth Him not, nor knoweth Him. But you shall know Him; because He shall abide with you and shall be in you.... He will teach you all things and bring all things to your mind, whatsoever I shall have said to you."²⁴⁸ These words were not only addressed to the apostles; they were verified in them on Pentecost, which is renewed for us by confirmation. This testimony of our Savior is clear, and it states exactly and in an admirable manner what we read in the Book of Wisdom (I: 4). It is indeed the three divine persons who come and dwell in the souls of the just. Thus the apostles understood it. St. John writes: "God is charity: and he that abideth in charity, abideth in God, and God in him."²⁴⁹ He possesses God in his heart; but still more God possesses him and holds him, preserving not only his natural existence, but the life of grace and charity in him. St. Paul speaks in like manner: "The charity of God is poured forth in our hearts, by the Holy Ghost who is given to us."²⁵⁰ We have received not only created charity, but the Holy Ghost Himself who has been given to us. St. Paul speaks of Him especially, because charity likens us more to the Holy Ghost, who is personal love, than to the Father and to the Son. They are also in us, according to the testimony of Christ, but we will be made perfectly like Them only when we receive the light of glory, which will imprint in us the resemblance to the Word, who is the splendor of the Father. On several different occasions St. Paul refers to this consoling doctrine: "Know you not that you are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?"²⁵¹ "Or know you not that your members are the temple of the Holy Ghost, who is in you, whom you have from God; and you are not your own? For you are bought with a great price. Glorify and bear God in your body."²⁵² Scripture thus teaches explicitly that the three divine persons dwell in every just soul, in every soul in the state of grace.

THE TESTIMONY OF TRADITION

Tradition, moreover, shows by the voice of the first martyrs, by that of the fathers, by the official teaching of the Church, that

the words of Scripture must be understood in this way.²⁵³

At the beginning of the second century, St. Ignatius of Antioch declares in his letters that true Christians bear God in themselves; he calls them “theophoroi” or God-bearers. This doctrine was widespread in the primitive Church: the martyrs proclaimed it before their judges. St. Lucy of Syracuse answered Paschasius:

“Words cannot fail those who have the Holy Spirit dwelling in them.”

“Is the Holy Ghost in you?”

“Yes, all those who lead a chaste and pious life are the temples of the Holy Ghost.”

Among the Greek fathers, St. Athanasius says that the three divine persons are in us.²⁵⁴ St. Basil declares that the Holy Ghost, by His presence, makes us more and more spiritual and like to the image of the only Son.²⁵⁵ St. Cyril of Alexandria also speaks of this intimate union between the just soul and the Holy Ghost.²⁵⁶ Among the Latin fathers, St. Ambrose teaches that we receive Him in baptism and even more in confirmation.²⁵⁷ St. Augustine shows that, according to the testimony of the early fathers, not only grace was given us, but God Himself, the Holy Ghost and His seven gifts.²⁵⁸

This revealed doctrine is finally brought home to us by the official teaching of the Church. In the Credo of St. Epiphanius, which adults were obliged to recite before receiving baptism, we read: “The Holy Spirit who... spoke in the apostles and dwells in the saints.”²⁵⁹ The Council of Trent declares also: “The efficient cause [of our justification] is the merciful God, who washes and sanctifies gratuitously, signing and anointing with the holy Spirit of promise, who is the pledge of our inheritance” (Eph. I: 13).²⁶⁰

The official teaching of the Church on this point has been stated even more precisely in our times by Leo XIII in his encyclical on the Holy Ghost, *Divinum illud munus* (May 9, 1897), in which the indwelling of the Blessed Trinity in the souls of the just is thus described:

It is well to recall the explanation given by the Doctors of the Church of the words of Holy Scripture. They say that God is present and exists in all things “by His power in so far as all things are subject to His power; by His presence, inasmuch as all things are naked and open to His eyes; by His essence, inasmuch as He is present to all as the cause of their being” (St. Thomas, Ia, q. 8, a. 3). But God is in man, not only as in inanimate things, but because He is more fully known and loved by him, since even by nature we spontaneously love, desire, and seek after the good. Moreover, God by grace resides in the just soul as in a temple, in a most intimate and peculiar manner. From this proceeds that union of affection by which the soul adheres most closely to God, more so than the friend is united to his most loving and beloved friend, and enjoys God in all fullness and sweetness.

Now this wonderful union, which is properly called “indwelling,” differing only in degree or state from that with which God beatifies the saints in heaven, although it is most certainly produced by the presence of the whole Blessed Trinity—“We will come to him and make Our abode with him” (John 14: 23)—nevertheless is attributed in a peculiar manner to the Holy Ghost. For, whilst traces of divine power and wisdom appear even in the wicked man, charity, which, as it were, is the special mark of the Holy Ghost, is shared in only by the just.... Wherefore the Apostle, when calling us the temple of God, does not expressly mention the Father, or the Son, but the Holy Ghost: “Know you not that your members are the temple of the Holy Ghost, who is in you, whom you have from God?” (1 Cor. 6: 19’)

The fullness of divine gifts is in many ways a consequence of the indwelling of the Holy Ghost in the souls of the just.... Among these gifts are those secret warnings and invitations which from time to time are excited in our minds and hearts by the inspiration of the Holy Ghost. Without these there is no beginning of a good life, no progress, no arriving at eternal salvation.

Such is, in substance, the testimony of tradition expressed by the teaching authority of the Church under its different forms. We shall now see what theology adds in order to give us, in addition, a certain understanding of this revealed mystery. We shall follow the teaching of St. Thomas on this subject.

THE THEOLOGICAL EXPLANATION OF THIS MYSTERY

Different explanations of this mystery have been proposed.²⁶¹ Among these different points of view, that of St. Thomas, preserved by Leo XIII in his encyclical on the Holy Ghost, seems the truest.²⁶²

For God is in all things by His essence, power, and presence, according to His one common mode, as the cause existing in the effects which participate in His goodness. Above and beyond this common mode, however, there is one special mode belonging to the rational nature wherein God is said to be present as the object known is in the knower, and the beloved in the lover. And since the rational creature by its own operation of (supernatural) knowledge and love attains to God Himself, according to this special mode, God is said not only to exist in the rational creature, but also to dwell therein as in His own temple. So no other effect can be put down as the reason why the divine Person is in the rational creature in a new mode, except sanctifying grace.... Again, we are said to possess only what we can freely use or enjoy; but to have the power of enjoying the divine Person can only be according to sanctifying grace.²⁶³

Without sanctifying grace and charity, God does not, in fact, dwell in us. It is not sufficient to know Him by a natural philosophical knowledge, or even by the supernatural knowledge of imperfect faith united to hope, as the believer in the state of mortal sin knows Him. (God is, so to speak, distant from a believer who is turned away from Him.) We must be able to know Him by living faith and the gifts of the Holy Ghost connected with charity. This last knowledge, being quasi-experimental, attains God not as a distant and simply represented reality, but as a present, possessed reality which we can enjoy even now. This is evidently what St. Thomas means in the text quoted.²⁶⁴ It is a question, he says, of a knowledge which

attains God Himself, and permits us to possess Him and to enjoy Him. That the divine persons may dwell in us, we must be able to know Them in a quasi-experimental and loving manner, based on infused charity, which gives us a connaturality or sympathy with the intimate life of God.²⁶⁵ That the Blessed Trinity may dwell in us, this quasi-experimental knowledge need not, however, be actual; it suffices that we be able to have it by the grace of the virtues and gifts. Thus the indwelling of the Blessed Trinity endures in the just man even during sleep and as long as he remains in the state of grace.²⁶⁶ From time to time, however, God may make Himself felt by us as the soul of our soul, the life of our life. This is what St. Paul declares in his epistle to the Romans (8: 15 f.): “You have received the spirit of adoption of sons, whereby we cry: Abba (Father). For the Spirit Himself giveth testimony to our spirit, that we are the sons of God.” In his commentary on this epistle, St. Thomas says: “The Holy Spirit gives this testimony to our spirit by the effect of filial love which He produces in us.”²⁶⁷ For this reason the disciples of Emmaus exclaimed after Jesus disappeared: “Was not our heart burning within us, whilst He spoke in the way and opened to us the Scriptures?”²⁶⁸

In giving the explanation we have just quoted, St. Thomas simply shows us the profound meaning of the words of Christ that we cited previously: “If anyone love Me, he will keep My word. And My Father will love him, and We will come to him, and will make Our abode with him.”²⁶⁹ “The Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring all things to your mind, whatsoever I shall have said to you.”²⁷⁰ According to this teaching, the Blessed Trinity dwells, in a sense, more perfectly in the just soul than the body of the Savior does in a consecrated host. Christ is, indeed, really and substantially present under the Eucharistic species, but these species of bread do not know and do not love. The Blessed Trinity dwells in the just soul as in a living temple which knows and loves in varying degrees. It dwells in the souls of the blessed who contemplate It unveiled, especially in the most holy soul of the Savior, to which the Word is personally united. And even here on earth, in the penumbra of faith, the Blessed Trinity, without our seeing It, dwells in us in order to vivify us more and more, up to the moment of our entrance into glory where It will appear to us.

This intimate presence of the Blessed Trinity in us does not dispense us, certainly, from approaching the Eucharistic table or from praying in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament, for the Blessed Trinity dwells far more intimately in the holy soul of the Savior, personally united to the Word, than in us. If we draw profit from approaching a saint who is entirely possessed by God, like a holy Cure of Ars, how much more will we profit from approaching our Savior? We can say to Him: “Come, even with Thy cross, and take more complete possession of us. Grant that the prayer, ‘Thou in us and we in Thee’ may be more fully realized.” Let us also think of the indwelling of the Blessed Trinity in the soul of the Blessed Virgin both here on earth and in heaven.

SPIRITUAL CONSEQUENCES OF THIS DOCTRINE

A consequence of primary importance springs from these considerations. If the indwelling of the Blessed Trinity in us cannot be conceived unless the just man can have a “quasi-experimental knowledge” of God present in him, what follows? That this knowledge, far from being something essentially extraordinary, like visions, revelations, or the stigmata, is in the normal way of sanctity.²⁷¹ This quasi-experimental knowledge of God present in us springs from faith illumined by the gifts of wisdom and understanding, which are connected with charity; whence it follows that this knowledge ought normally to grow with the progress of charity, either under a clearly contemplative form, or under a form more directly oriented toward action. Farther on, we shall also declare that infused contemplation, in which this quasi-experience develops, begins, according to St. John of the Cross, with the illuminative way and develops in the unitive way.²⁷² This quasi-experimental knowledge of God, of His goodness, will grow with the knowledge of our nothingness and wretchedness, according to the divine words spoken to St. Catherine of Siena: “I am who am; thou art she who is not.”

It also follows that, when our charity increases notably, the divine persons are sent anew, says St. Thomas,²⁷³ for They become more intimately present in us according to a new mode or degree of intimacy. This is true, for example, at the time of the second conversion, which marks the entrance into the illuminative way.

Finally, They are in us not only as an object of supernatural knowledge and love, but as principles of supernatural operations. Christ Himself said: “My Father worketh until now; and I work,” especially in the intimacy of the heart, in the center of the soul.

We should, moreover, remember in a practical way that ordinarily God communicates Himself to His creature only in the measure of the creature’s dispositions. When these become more pure, the divine persons also become more intimately present and active. Then God belongs to us and we to Him, and we desire above all to make progress in His love. “This doctrine of the invisible missions of the divine persons in us is one of the most powerful motives for spiritual advancement,” says Father Chardon, “because it keeps the soul ever on the alert in regard to its progress, awake to produce incessantly ever stronger and more fervent acts of all the virtues, that, growing in grace, this new growth may bring God anew to it... for a union... which is characterized by greater intimacy, purity, and vigor.”²⁷⁴

In Proverbs we read: “My son, give Me thy heart.”²⁷⁵ And in the Apocalypse we are told: “Behold, I stand at the gate, and knock. If any man shall hear My voice and open to Me the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with Me.”²⁷⁶ The soul of a just man is like a heaven that is still obscure, since the Blessed Trinity is in him, and some day he will see It there unveiled.

Our duties toward the interior Guest may be summed up in the following suggestions: that we think often of Him and tell ourselves that God lives in us; that we consecrate our day, our hour, to the divine persons by saying, “In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost”; that we remember that the interior Guest is for us the source of light, consolation, and strength; that we pray to Him as Christ suggests: “Pray to thy Father in secret (in thy soul): and thy Father who seeth in secret, will repay thee”;²⁷⁷ that we adore the interior Guest saying: “My soul doth magnify the Lord”; that we believe in Him; that we trust absolutely in Him, and love Him with an increasingly pure, generous, and strong love; that we love Him by imitating Him, especially by goodness, according to the words of our Savior: “Be you therefore perfect, as also your heavenly Father is perfect”;²⁷⁸ “That they all may be one, as Thou, Father, in Me, and I in Thee; that they also may be one in Us.”²⁷⁹

As we shall see more clearly in the following pages, all this leads us to think that far from being essentially extraordinary, the mystical life alone, which is characterized by the reality of the quasi-experimental knowledge of God present in us, is completely normal. Only the saints, all of whom live this sort of life, are fully in order. Before experiencing this intimate union with God present in us, we are somewhat like souls still half-asleep, souls not yet spiritually awakened. Our knowledge of the consoling mystery of the indwelling of the Blessed Trinity is still too superficial and bookish, and yet overflowing life is offered to us.

Before entering into the intimacy of union with God, our adoration and love of Him are not what they ought to be, and frequently we consider the “one thing necessary” as if it were not the most important thing for us. Likewise we have not yet become profoundly cognizant of the gift that has been given us in the Eucharist, and we have only a superficial knowledge of the nature of the mystical body of Christ.

The Holy Ghost is the soul of the mystical body, of which Christ is the head. As in our body the soul is entirely in the whole body and entirely in each part, and exercises its superior functions in the head, so the Holy Ghost is entirely in all the mystical body, entirely in each just soul, and exercises His highest functions in the holy soul of the Savior, and through it on us. The vital principle which thus constitutes the unity of the mystical body is singularly more unitive than the soul which unifies our body, than the spirit of a family or of a nation. The spirit of a family is a certain manner of seeing, judging, feeling, loving, willing, and acting. The spirit of the mystical body is infinitely more unifying; it is the Holy Ghost the Sanctifier, source of all graces, source of living water springing up into eternal life. The stream of grace, which comes from the Holy Ghost, unceasingly reascends toward God under the form of adoration, prayer, merit, and sacrifice; it is the elevation toward God, the prelude of the life of heaven. Such are the supernatural realities of which we should become increasingly more conscious. Only in the mystical life does the soul truly awaken completely, and have that lively, profound, radiating consciousness of the gift of God that is necessary if the soul is to correspond fully with the love of God for us.

The Influence of Christ the Redeemer on His Mystical Body

The Blessed Trinity which dwells in every just soul is, as we have seen, the uncreated source of our interior life. But our sanctification depends also on the constant influence of Christ the Redeemer, who incessantly communicates to us, through the sacraments and outside of them, the graces He merited for us during His earthly life, and especially during His passion. Therefore it is fitting that we speak here of this sanctifying influence in general, and that we consider how it is exercised in particular by the greatest of all sacraments, the Eucharist.²⁸⁰

HOW THE SAVIOR COMMUNICATES TO US THE GRACES WHICH HE FORMERLY MERITED FOR US

As the living instrument ever united to the divinity, source of all grace, Christ communicates to us the graces which he formerly merited for us. St. John says: "Of His fullness we all have received."²⁸¹

Christ Himself tells this to us in a most expressive, symbolical manner: "I am the true vine; you the branches.... As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abide in the vine, so neither can you, unless you abide in Me.... He that abideth in Me, and I in him, the same beareth much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing.... If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you shall ask whatever you will, and it shall be done unto you."²⁸² Elsewhere Jesus likewise says: "Seek ye therefore first the kingdom of God and His justice, and all these things shall be added unto you."²⁸³ By this He means that, if we ask especially for a living, more intimate, and profound knowledge of Him (which is given by the Holy Ghost) and for a purer and stronger love of Him, we shall be heard. Who would dare to say that Christ is not speaking here of the prayer by which His members ask for the infused contemplation of the mysteries of salvation? "In this," He adds, "is My Father glorified; that you bring forth very much fruit, and become My disciples."

This beautiful figure of the vine and the branches is most expressive. St. Paul reverts to it under the form of the olive tree in which we are ingrafted.²⁸⁴ He also gives another that is no less striking. Christ, he says, is like the head which communicates to the members the vital influx, which has its principle in the soul. The Church is the mystical body of Christ; Christians are the members of this body. He often repeats this statement: "Now you are the body of Christ, and members of member."²⁸⁵ "But doing the truth in charity, we may in all things grow up in Him who is the head, even Christ: from whom the whole body, being compacted and fitly joined together by what every joint supplieth... maketh increase of the body, unto the edifying of itself in charity."²⁸⁶ "And let the peace of Christ rejoice in your hearts, wherein also you are called in one body."²⁸⁷

According to this doctrine, the Savior communicates to us the vital influx of grace (of which the source is God Himself considered in His divine nature), as the head communicates to the members the vital influx, the principle of which is in the soul. Clearly to understand this teaching, we must distinguish between the divinity and the humanity of Christ. Jesus, as the Word, dwells, as do the Father and the Holy Ghost, in the center, in the depths of our soul. He is closer to it than it is to itself; He preserves its natural and its supernatural life. By operating grace, He moves it to the deepest, most secret acts which it could not produce by itself.²⁸⁸ The humanity of our Savior, says St. Thomas,²⁸⁹ is the instrument ever united to the divinity through which all graces are communicated to us. Just as in the sacraments, the water of baptism, for example, and the sacramental formula are the physical, instrumental cause of sacramental grace, in the sense that God, by making use of this water and this formula, communicates to them a transitory divine power to produce this grace, so also the humanity of the Savior and especially the acts of His holy soul are the physical, instrumental cause of all the graces we receive, either through the sacraments or outside of them.²⁹⁰

The sacred humanity of the Savior does not dwell in our soul. His body could not be in our soul; it is only in heaven (as in its natural place) and sacramentally in the Eucharist. But, although the humanity of Christ does not dwell in us, the just soul is continually under its influence, since by its intermediary every grace is communicated to us, just as in our body the head communicates the vital influx to the members. Since at every waking moment we have some duty to accomplish, Christ's humanity communicates to us from minute to minute the actual grace of the present moment, as the air we breathe continually enters our lungs. God, the Author of grace, makes use of Christ's humanity to communicate grace to us, as a great artist uses an instrument to transmit his musical thought to us, or as a great thinker uses his own style, his more or less rich language, to express himself. Thus the seven sacraments are like the strings of a lyre from which God alone can, by His divine touch, draw music. The Savior's humanity is a conscious, free, and superior instrument, ever united to the divinity in order to communicate to us all the graces that we receive and that Christ merited for us on the cross. Thus every illumination of the intellect, every

grace of attraction, of consolation, or of strength, whether felt or not, actually come to us from the sacred humanity. For each of our salutary acts, it is a continual influence far more profound than that exercised over a child by the best of mothers when she teaches him to pray.

Outside the sacraments, this activity of the Savior transmits the lights of faith to unbelievers who do not resist it; to sinners, the grace of attrition, which invites them to approach the sacrament of penance. Especially through the Eucharist His influence is exercised, for the Eucharist is the most perfect of the sacraments, containing not only grace but the Author of grace; and it is a sacrifice of infinite value. This point must be insisted on here in speaking of the bases or the sources of the interior life.

THE SANCTIFYING INFLUENCE OF THE SAVIOR THROUGH THE EUCHARIST

The very terms that Christ used in the Gospel to describe this influence may be fittingly used here.

To draw greater spiritual profit from this influence and to thank the Lord for it, we may recall how, through love for our souls, Christ first promised the Eucharist; how He gave it to us at the Last Supper by instituting the priesthood; how He renews it every day in the Sacrifice of the Mass; how He wishes to remain among us by assuring the continuity of His real presence; and finally, how He gives Himself to us in daily Communion, continuing to do so until we last receive Him as holy viaticum. All these acts of divine generosity spring from one and the same love and are all ordained to our progressive sanctification. They deserve a special thanksgiving. Such is the true meaning of the devotion to the Eucharistic heart of Jesus. His heart is called “Eucharistic” because it gave us the Eucharist and still continues to do so. As people say that the air is healthful when it maintains or restores health, the heart of our Savior is called “Eucharistic” because it has given us the greatest of the sacraments, in which it is itself really and substantially present as the radiant source of ever new graces.

The words of the promise of the Eucharist, recorded by St. John (6:26–59), show us best of all what this vivifying influence of the Savior on us should be, and how we ought to receive it. First of all, Christ promised a heavenly bread. After the miracle of the multiplication of the loaves, He said: “Labor not for the meat which perisheth, but for that which endureth unto life everlasting, which the Son of man will give you.... My Father giveth you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is that which cometh down from heaven, and giveth life to the world.”²⁹¹ Then a number of those who had eaten their fill after the miracle of the multiplication of the loaves exclaimed: “Lord, give us always this bread.” Jesus answered them: “I am the bread of life.... You also have seen Me, and you believe not.”²⁹² The Jews murmured, says St. John,²⁹³ because He had said: “I am the living bread which came down from heaven.” Jesus replied: “Murmur not among yourselves.... Amen, amen I say unto you: he that believeth in Me, hath everlasting life. I am the bread of life. Your fathers did eat manna in the desert, and are dead. This is the bread which cometh down from heaven; that if any man eat of it, he may not die. I am the living bread which came down from heaven. If any man eat of this bread, he shall live forever; and the bread that I will give, is My flesh, for the life of the world.... He that eateth My flesh and drinketh My blood hath everlasting life: and I will raise him up in the last day. For My flesh is meat indeed: and My blood is drink indeed.... The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life.”²⁹⁴ Many did not believe and withdrew. “Then Jesus said to the twelve: Will you also go away? And Simon Peter answered Him: Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life.”²⁹⁵ This promise of the Eucharist makes us glimpse all that this sacrament ought to produce in us, whether beginners, proficients, or the perfect.

The institution of the Eucharist shows us the import of this promise. It is thus related in St. Matthew, and almost in the same terms in St. Mark, St. Luke, and the First Epistle to the Corinthians: “And whilst they were at supper, Jesus took bread, and blessed, and broke: and gave to His disciples, and said: Take ye, and eat. This is My body. And taking the chalice, He gave thanks, and gave to them, saying: Drink ye all of this. For this is My blood of the new testament, which shall be shed for many unto remission of sins.”²⁹⁶ The words of the promise are illumined. Peter was rewarded for having said with faith: “Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life.” At the Last Supper, Christ’s word was more efficacious than ever; it was a transubstantiating word by which He changed the substance of bread into that of His own body that He might remain sacramentally among us. At the same moment He instituted the priesthood to perpetuate sacramentally, by means of the Eucharist, the sacrifice of the cross until the end of time. Christ says, in fact, as St. Luke relates,²⁹⁷ and as St. Paul states: “This do for the commemoration of Me.”²⁹⁸ The apostles then received the power to consecrate, to offer the Eucharistic sacrifice, which perpetuates in substance the sacrifice of the cross in order to apply its fruits, its merits, and its satisfactions to us until the end of the world. In the Mass, the principal priest is Christ, who continues to offer Himself sacramentally. As St. Paul says, He is “always living to make intercession for us.”²⁹⁹ He does this especially in the Holy Sacrifice. By reason of the principal priest and of the victim offered, of the precious blood sacramentally shed, this sacrifice has an infinite value. At the same time, Christ offers to His Father our adoration, our supplication, our reparation, our thanksgiving, all the salutary acts of His mystical body.

Christ’s love did not give us the Eucharist only once, but gives it to us daily. He might have willed that Mass should be celebrated only once or twice a year in some great sanctuary to which people would come from afar. On the contrary, not only

one Mass, but numbers of them are celebrated continually, at every minute of the day, over the surface of the earth. Thus He grants to His Church the graces it needs at the various moments of its history. In the catacombs, later during the great barbarian invasions, in the iron centuries of the Middle Ages, the Mass was the source of ever new graces; it is still so today that it may give us the strength to resist the great dangers threatening us.

Moreover, Christ daily returns really and substantially among us, not only for an hour during the celebration of the Eucharistic sacrifice, but to remain continually with us in the tabernacle, to be there “the companion of our exile, patiently waiting for us, eager to hear and grant our prayers” and unceasingly to offer there to His Father adoration of infinite value.

Finally, Communion is the consummation of the gift of self. Goodness is essentially diffusive, it attracts, it gives itself to vivify us and to enrich us spiritually. This is especially true of the radiating goodness of God and of His Christ. In Communion, the Savior draws us and gives Himself, not only to humanity in general, but to each one of us if we wish it, and in an ever more intimate manner if we are faithful. He gives Himself, not that we should assimilate Him, for this would reduce Him to our level; but that we may be made more like to Him. “The bread, which we break,” says St. Paul. “is it not the partaking of the body of the Lord?”³⁰⁰ It is Life itself that we receive.

Communion ought to incorporate us more and more into Christ, by increasing our humility, faith, confidence, and especially our charity, in order to make our hearts like to that of the Savior who died out of love for us. In this sense, each of our Communions should be substantially more fervent than the preceding one, that is, as far as fervor of the will is concerned; for each Communion ought not only to preserve but to increase the love of God in us, and thus dispose us to receive our Lord on the following day with not only an equal but a greater fervor of will, although it may be otherwise as regards sensible fervor, which is accidental.³⁰¹ There should be, as it were, an accelerated progress toward God, which recalls the acceleration of bodies as they gravitate toward the center which attracts them. As a stone falls more rapidly as it approaches the earth which attracts it, souls should advance more rapidly toward God as they draw near Him and are more attracted by Him. We find this idea expressed in many forms in the liturgy, and especially in the *Adoro Te* of St. Thomas Aquinas:

Adoro te devote, latens Deitas

I adore Thee devoutly, O hidden Deity, who art truly hidden beneath these figures; my heart submits entirely to Thee, and faints in contemplating Thee.

Fac me tibi semper magis credere,
In te spem habere, te diligere.

Make me believe Thee ever more and more, hope in Thee, and love Thee.

O memoriale mortis Domini,
Panis vivus, vitam praestans homini:
Praesta meae menti de te vivere,
Et te illi semper dulce sapere.

O memorial of the death of the Lord! Living bread giving life to man, grant that my soul may live by Thee and ever taste Thee with delight!

Pie pellicane, Jesu Domine,
Me immundum munda tuo sanguine.

Merciful Pelican, Jesus Lord, unclean I am, cleanse me in Thy blood, of which a single drop suffices to cleanse the entire world of all its sin.

Jesu, quem velatum nunc aspicio,
Ora fiat illud, quod tam sitio:
Ut te revelata cernens facie,
Visu sim beatus tuae gloriae. Amen.

Jesus, whom I now behold beneath these veils, grant, I pray Thee, what so ardently I desire, that contemplating Thee face to face, the vision of Thy glory may make me blessed. Amen.

Should a soul thus live daily by the Savior in Mass and Communion, it would certainly arrive at great intimacy with Him, at the intimacy which is that of the mystical life. The gifts of the Holy Ghost would grow proportionately in it, and it would attain to an increasingly more penetrating and delightful contemplation of the great mystery of our altars, of the infinite value of the Mass, which is like an eminent spring of ever new graces to which all succeeding generations must come and drink, that they may have the strength to arrive at the end of their journey towards eternity. Thus the prophet Elias, overcome by fatigue, renewed his strength by eating the loaf that came down from heaven, and was able to walk even to Horeb, a figure of the summit of perfection.

Christ says to us in Communion, as He said to St. Augustine: “I am the bread of the strong.... Thou wilt not convert Me into

thee, as the food of thy flesh; but thou shalt be converted into Me.”³⁰² He who truly receives Christ in Holy Communion is more and more incorporated in Him, living by His thought and by His love. He can say with St. Paul: “To me to live is Christ and to die is gain,” for death is the entrance into unending life.

PROGRESSIVE INCORPORATION IN CHRIST AND SANCTITY

The doctrine of progressive incorporation in Christ will manifest its marvelous fecundity to the soul that wishes to live by it.³⁰³

First of all, in order to die to sin and its consequences, we will recall what St. Paul says: “We are buried together with Him (Christ) by baptism into death... that the body of sin may be destroyed.”³⁰⁴ “And they that are Christ’s have crucified their flesh, with the vices and concupiscences”;³⁰⁵ this is the death to sin through baptism and penance. Then, in the light of faith and under the inspiration of the Holy Ghost, the Christian should put on “the new (man), him who is renewed unto knowledge, according to the image of Him that created him.... Put ye on therefore, as the elect of God,” adds St. Paul, “holy, and beloved, the bowels of mercy, benignity, humility, modesty, patience.... But above all these things have charity, which is the bond of perfection.”³⁰⁶ This is the illuminative way of those who imitate Christ, who adopt His sentiments, the spirit of His mysteries, His passion,³⁰⁷ His crucifixion,³⁰⁸ His resurrection.³⁰⁹ This is the way of the contemplation of the Savior’s mysteries which all the saints have lived, even those of the active life, while recalling these words of the Apostle: “Furthermore, I count all things to be but loss for the excellent knowledge of Jesus Christ my Lord; for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but as dung, that I may gain Christ.”³¹⁰

This road leads to continual union with the Savior, according to the sublime words of the Epistle to the Colossians (3: 1–3): “If you be risen with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is sitting at the right hand of God. Mind the things that are above, not the things that are upon the earth. For you are dead (to the world); and your life is hid with Christ in God.” Then the peace of the Savior reigns in the soul that delights in saying to Him: “Lord, give Thyself to me, and give me to Thyself.” In the saints, this union is like an almost uninterrupted communion. A glance, a movement of the soul toward Christ, tell Him our desires, present to Him our weakness, our good will, our disposition to be faithful to Him, and the thirst we have for Him. Such is the way of the loving contemplation of the great mysteries of Christ; it has its aridities and its joys. Those who experience it, see in it the normal prelude of the vision of heaven.

Some delude themselves, pretending to reach union with God without having continual recourse to our Lord. They will scarcely attain any but an abstract knowledge of God. They will not reach that delightful, living, quasi-experimental knowledge, as well as an elevated and practical knowledge, called wisdom, which makes the soul see God and His providence in the most insignificant things. The quietists fell into this error, holding that the sacred humanity of our Savior is a means useful only at the beginning of the spiritual life.³¹¹ St. Teresa reacted especially against this point, reminding us that we should not of our own accord leave aside in prayer the consideration of Christ’s humanity; it is the road which gently leads souls to His divinity.³¹² We ought often to think of the immense spiritual riches of the holy soul of Christ, of His intellect, of His will, of His sensibility. By so doing we will come to a better understanding of the meaning of His words: “I am the way, the truth, and the life.” He is the way according to His humanity; as God, He is the very essence of truth and life.

The Influence of Mary Mediatrix

When the bases of the interior life are considered, we cannot discuss the action of Christ, the universal Mediator, on His mystical body without also speaking of the influence of Mary Mediatrix. As we remarked, many persons delude themselves, maintaining that they reach union with God without having continual recourse to our Lord, who is the way, the truth, and the life. Another error would consist in wishing to go to our Lord without going first to Mary, whom the Church calls in a special feast the Mediatrix of all graces. Protestants have fallen into this last error. Without going as far as this deviation, there are Catholics who do not see clearly enough the necessity of having recourse to Mary that they may attain to intimacy with the Savior. Blessed Grignon de Montfort speaks even of “doctors who know the Mother of God only in a speculative, dry, sterile, and indifferent manner; who fear that devotion to the Blessed Virgin is abused, and that injury is done to our Lord by honoring too greatly His holy Mother. If they speak of devotion to Mary, it is less to recommend it than to destroy the abuses that have grown up around it.”³¹³ They seem to believe that Mary is a hindrance to reaching divine union. According to Blessed Grignon, we lack humility if we neglect the mediators whom God has given us because of our frailty. Intimacy with our Lord in prayer will be greatly facilitated by a true and profound devotion to Mary.

To get a clear idea of this devotion, we shall consider what must be understood by universal mediation, and also how Mary is the mediatrix of all graces, as is affirmed by tradition and by the Office and Mass of Mary Mediatrix which are celebrated on May 31. Much has been written on the subject in recent years. We shall here consider this doctrine in its relation to the interior life.³¹⁴

THE MEANING OF UNIVERSAL MEDIATION

St. Thomas says: “Properly speaking, the office of a mediator is to join together those between whom he mediates: for extremes are united by an intermediary. Now to unite men to God perfectly belongs to Christ, through whom men are reconciled to God, according to II Cor. 5: 19: ‘God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself.’ And, consequently, Christ alone is the perfect Mediator of God and men, inasmuch as, by His death, He reconciled the human race to God. Hence the Apostle, after saying, ‘Mediator of God and man, the man Christ Jesus,’ added: ‘Who gave Himself a redemption for all.’ However, nothing hinders certain others from being called mediators, in some respect, between God and man, forasmuch as they cooperate in uniting men to God, dispositive or ministerially.”³¹⁵ In this sense, adds St. Thomas,³¹⁶ the prophets and priests of the Old Testament may be called mediators, and also the priests of the New Testament, as ministers of the true Mediator.

St. Thomas explains further how Christ as man is the Mediator: “Because, as man, He is distant both from God by nature, and from man by dignity of both grace and glory. Again, it belongs to Him, as man, to unite men to God, by communicating to men both precepts and gifts, and by offering satisfaction and prayers to God for men.”³¹⁷ Christ satisfied and merited as man by a satisfaction and a merit which drew an infinite value from His divine personality. This mediation is twofold, both descending and ascending. It consists in giving to men the light and grace of God, and in offering to God, on behalf of men, the worship and reparation due to Him.

As has been said, there is nothing to prevent there being mediators below Christ, subordinated to Him as secondary mediators, such as were the prophets and priests of the Old Law for the chosen people. It may thus be asked whether Mary is the universal mediatrix for all men and for the distribution of all graces in general and in particular. St. Albert the Great speaks of the mediation of Mary as superior to that of the prophets when he says: “Mary was chosen by the Lord, not as a minister but to be associated in a very special and quite intimate manner in the work of the redemption of the human race: ‘Faciamus ei adjutorium simile sibi.’”³¹⁸

Is not Mary in her quality as Mother of God completely designated to be the universal mediatrix? Is she not truly the intermediary between God and men? She is, indeed, much below God and Christ because she is a creature, but much above all men by the grace of her divine maternity, “which makes her attain the very frontiers of the divinity,”³¹⁹ and by the plenitude of grace received at the moment of her immaculate conception; a plenitude which did not cease to grow until her death. Not only was Mary thus designated by her divine maternity for this function of mediatrix, but she received it in truth and exercised it. This is shown by tradition,³²⁰ which has given her the title of universal mediatrix in the proper sense of the word,³²¹ although in a manner subordinated to Christ. This title is consecrated by the special feast which is celebrated in the universal Church.

To have a clear understanding of the meaning and import of this title, we shall consider how it is becoming to Mary for two principal reasons: because she cooperated by satisfaction and merit in the sacrifice of the cross; and because she does not cease to intercede for us, to obtain for us, and to distribute to us all the graces that we receive. Such is the double mediation, ascending and descending, which we ought to ponder in order daily to draw greater profit from it.

MARY MEDIATRIX BY HER COOPERATION IN THE SACRIFICE OF THE CROSS

During the entire course of her earthly life, the Blessed Virgin cooperated in the sacrifice of her Son. First of all, the free consent that she gave on Annunciation day was necessary for the accomplishment of the mystery of the Incarnation, as if, says St. Thomas,³²² God had waited for the consent of humanity through the voice of Mary. By this free fiat, she cooperated in the sacrifice of the cross, since she gave us its Priest and Victim. She cooperated in it also by offering her Son in the Temple, as a most pure host, at the moment when the aged Simeon saw by prophetic light that this Child was the “salvation... prepared before the face of all peoples: a light to the revelation of the Gentiles and the glory of Thy people Israel”³²³ More enlightened than Simeon, Mary offered her Son, and began to suffer deeply with Him when she heard the holy old man tell her that He would be a sign which would be contradicted and that a sword would pierce her soul.

Mary cooperated in the sacrifice of Christ, especially at the foot of the cross, uniting herself to Him, more closely than can be expressed, by satisfaction or reparation, and by merit. Some saints, in particular the stigmatics, have been exceptionally united to the sufferings and merits of our Savior: for example, St. Francis of Assisi and St. Catherine of Siena, and yet their share in His suffering cannot be compared with Mary's. How did Mary offer her Son? As He offered Himself. By a miracle, Jesus could easily have prevented the blows of His executioners from causing His death; He offered Himself voluntarily. “No man,” He says, “taketh it (My life) away from Me: but I lay it down of Myself. And I have power to lay it down: and I have power to take it up again.”³²⁴ Jesus renounced His right to life; He offered Himself wholly for our salvation. Of Mary, St. John says: “There stood by the cross of Jesus, His mother,”³²⁵ surely very closely united to Him in His suffering and oblation. As Pope Benedict XV says: “She renounced her rights as a mother over her Son for the salvation of all men.”³²⁶ She accepted the martyrdom of Christ and offered it for us. In the measure of her love, she felt all the torments that He suffered in body and soul. More than anyone else, Mary endured the very suffering of the Savior; she suffered for sin in the degree of her love for God, whom sin offends; for her Son, whom sin crucified; for souls, which sin ravishes and kills. The Blessed Virgin's charity incomparably surpassed that of the greatest saints. She thus cooperated in the sacrifice of the cross by way of satisfaction or reparation, by offering to God for us, with great sorrow and most ardent love, the life of her most dear Son, whom she rightly adored and who was dearer to her than her very life.

In that instant, the Savior satisfied for us in strict justice by His human acts which drew from His divine personality an infinite value capable of making reparation for the offense of all mortal sins that ever had been or would be committed. His love pleased God more than all sins displease Him.³²⁷ Herein lies the essence of the mystery of the redemption. In union with her Son on Calvary, Mary satisfied for us by a satisfaction based, not on strict justice, but on the rights of the infinite friendship or charity which united her to God.³²⁸

At the moment when her Son was about to die on the cross, apparently defeated and abandoned, she did not cease for a moment to believe that He was the Word made flesh, the Savior of the world, who would rise in three days as He had predicted. This was the greatest act of faith and hope ever made; after Christ's act of love, it was also the greatest act of love. It made Mary the queen of martyrs,

for she was a martyr, not only for Christ but with Christ; so much so, that a single cross sufficed for her Son and for her. She was, in a sense, nailed to it by her love for Him. She was thus the coredemptrix, as Pope Benedict XV says, in this sense, that with Christ, through Him, and in Him, she bought back the human race.³²⁹

For the same reason, all that Christ merited for us on the cross in strict justice, Mary merited for us by congruous merit, based on the charity that united her to God. Christ alone, as head of the human race, could strictly merit to transmit divine life to us. But Pius X sanctioned the teaching of theologians when he wrote: “Mary, united to Christ in the work of salvation, merited *de congruo* for us what Christ merited for us *de condigno*.”³³⁰

This common teaching of theologians, thus sanctioned by the sovereign pontiffs, has for its principal traditional basis the fact that Mary is called in all Greek and Latin tradition the new Eve, Mother of all men in regard to the life of the soul, as Eve was in regard to the life of the body. It stands to reason that the spiritual mother of all men ought to give them spiritual life, not as the principal physical cause (for God alone can be the principal physical cause of divine grace), but as the moral cause by merit *de congruo*, merit *de condigno* being reserved to Christ.

The Office and Mass proper to Mary Mediatrix assemble the principal testimonies of tradition on this point with their scriptural foundations, in particular the clearcut statements of St. Ephrem, the glory of the Syriac Church, of St. Germanus of Constantinople, of St. Bernard, and of St. Bernardine of Siena. Even as early as the second and third centuries, St. Justin, St.

Irenaeus, and Tertullian insisted on the parallel between Eve and Mary, and showed that if the first concurred in our fall, the second collaborated in our redemption.³³¹

This teaching of tradition itself rests in part on the words of Christ, related in the Gospel of the Mass for the feast of Mary Mediatrix. The Savior was about to die and, seeing “His mother and the disciple standing whom He loved, He saith to His mother: Woman, behold thy son. After that, He saith to the disciple: Behold thy mother. And from that hour the disciple took her to his own.”³³² The literal meaning of these words, “Behold thy son,” points to St. John, but for God, events and persons signify others;³³³ here St. John represents spiritually all men purchased by the sacrifice of the cross. God and His Christ speak not only by the words They use, but by the events and persons whose masters They are, and by whom They signify what They wish according to the plan of Providence. The dying Christ, addressing Mary and John, saw in John the personification of all men, for whom He was shedding His blood. As this word, so to speak, created in Mary a most profound maternal affection, which did not cease to envelop the soul of the beloved disciple, this supernatural affection extended to all of us and made Mary truly the spiritual mother of all men. In the eighth century we find Abbot Rupert expressing this same idea, and after him St. Bernardine of Siena, Bossuet, Blessed Grignon de Montfort, and many others. It is the logical result of what tradition tells us about the new Eve, the spiritual mother of all men.

Finally, if we studied theologically all that is required for merit *de congruo*, based not on justice, but on charity or supernatural friendship which unites us to God, we could not find it better realized than in Mary. Since, in fact, a good Christian mother by her virtue thus merits graces for her children,³³⁴ with how much greater reason can Mary, who is incomparably more closely united to God by the plenitude of her charity, merit *de congruo* for all men.

Such is the ascending mediation of Mary in so far as she offered the sacrifice of the cross with Christ for us, making reparation and meriting for us. We shall now consider the descending mediation, by which she distributes the gifts of God to us.

MARY OBTAINS AND DISTRIBUTES ALL GRACES

That Mary obtains for us and distributes to us all graces is a certain doctrine, according to what we have just said about the mother of all men. As mother, she is interested in their salvation, prays for them, and obtains for them the graces they receive. In the Ave Maris Stella we read:

Salve vincla reis,
Profer lumen caecis,
Mala nostra pelle,
Bona cuncta posce.³³⁵

Break the sinner's fetters,
To the blind give day,
Ward all evils from us,
For all blessings pray.

In an encyclical on the Rosary, Leo XIII says: “According to the will of God, nothing is granted to us except through Mary; and, as no one can go to the Father except through the Son, so generally no one can draw near to Christ except through Mary.”³³⁶

The Church, in fact, turns to Mary to obtain graces of all kinds, both temporal and spiritual; among these last, from the grace of conversion up to that of final perseverance, to say nothing of those needed by virgins to preserve virginity, by apostles to exercise their apostolate, by martyrs to remain firm in the faith. In the Litany of Loreto, which has been universally recited in the Church for many centuries, Mary is for this reason called: “Health of the sick, refuge of sinners, comforter of the afflicted, help of Christians, queen of apostles, of martyrs, of confessors, of virgins.” Thus all kinds of graces are distributed by her, even, in a sense, those of the sacraments; for she merited them for us in union with Christ on Calvary. In addition, she disposes us, by her prayer, to approach the sacraments and to receive them well. At times she even sends us a priest, without whom this sacramental help would not be given to us.

Finally, not only every kind of grace is distributed to us by Mary, but every grace in particular. Is this not what the faith of the Church says in the words of the Hail Mary: “Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our death. Amen”? This “now” is said every moment in the Church by thousands of Christians who thus ask for the grace of the present moment. This grace is the most individual of graces; it varies with each of us, and for each one of us at every moment. If we are distracted while saying this word, Mary, who is not distracted, knows our spiritual needs of every instant, and prays for us, and obtains for us all the graces that we receive. This teaching, contained in the faith of the Church and expressed by the common prayers (*lex orandi lex credendi*), is based on Scripture and tradition. Even during her earthly life, Mary truly appears in Scripture as the distributor of graces. Through Mary, Jesus sanctified the Precursor when she went to visit her cousin Elizabeth and sang the Magnificat. Through His mother, Jesus confirmed the faith of the disciples at Cana, by granting

the miracle that she asked. Through her, He strengthened the faith of John on Calvary, saying to him: "Behold thy mother." Lastly, by her the Holy Ghost came down upon the apostles, for she was praying with them in the cenacle on Pentecost day when the Holy Ghost descended in the form of tongues of fire.

With even greater reason after the assumption and her entrance into glory, Mary is the distributor of all graces. As a beatified mother knows in heaven the spiritual needs of her children whom she left on earth, Mary knows the spiritual needs of all men. Since she is an excellent mother, she prays for them and, since she is all powerful over the heart of her Son, she obtains for them all the graces that they receive, all which those receive who do not persist in evil. She is, it has been said, like an aqueduct of graces and, in the mystical body, like the virginal neck uniting the head to its members.

When we treat of what the prayer of proficients ought to be, we shall speak of true devotion to Mary as it was understood by Blessed Grignon de Montfort. Even now we can see how expedient it is frequently to use the prayer of mediators, that is, to begin our prayer by a trusting, filial conversation with Mary, that she may lead us to the intimacy of her Son, and that the holy soul of the Savior may then lift us to union with God, since Christ is the way, the truth, and the life.

The Growth of the Life of Grace by Merit, Prayer and the Sacraments

We cannot treat of the bases of the interior life, of its source, without speaking of the growth of sanctifying grace and of charity. No one can be saved without this supernatural virtue, the highest of all, which ought to inspire and animate the others. Moreover, it ought not to remain stationary, but should grow in us even until death.³³⁷ This point of doctrine can and should throw great light on the spiritual life since it is the basis of every exhortation to make progress with great humility and generosity by ardently desiring the full perfection of charity, intimate union with God, by striving to obtain it, and humbly asking for it., The virtues of humility and magnanimity ought always to be united. We shall see, first of all, why charity ought ever to increase in us until death; then, how it should grow in three ways: by merit, prayer, and the sacraments.

WHY THE LIFE OF GRACE AND CHARITY SHOULD GROW IN US UNTIL DEATH

We must first point out that no matter how low in degree, true charity, received in baptism or restored by absolution, already loves God, the Author of salvation, more than self and above all things, and one's neighbor as oneself for the love of God. The slightest degree of infused charity immensely surpasses the natural love that we can have for God, the Author of nature, and for man. Charity, no matter of how low a degree, excludes no one, for this exclusion would be a grave sin which would destroy it. Nevertheless this charity of beginners is not victorious over all egoism; far from it. Beside it we find in our souls an inordinate love of self which, without being gravely culpable, is an obstacle that takes from charity the freedom of its action or its radiation. Gray stands between black and white. Between the state of mortal sin and that of perfect and radiant charity, stands charity of a very low degree, the exercise of which is often hindered by a troop of habitual venial sins, of immoderate self-love, of vanity, of laziness, of injustice, and the like.

Undoubtedly, this charity of low degree ought to grow. St. Paul says to the Ephesians (4: 15): "But doing the truth in charity, we may in all things grow up in Him." To the Philippians (1: 9) he declares: "I pray that your charity may more and more abound"; and in the First Epistle to the Thessalonians (3: 12 f.): "May the Lord multiply you, and make you abound in charity towards one another, and towards all men: as we do also towards you, to confirm your hearts without blame, in holiness, before God." In the Apocalypse (22: 11) we read: "He that is just, let him be justified still: and he that is holy, let him be sanctified still." In the Old Testament, the Book of Proverbs (4: 18) tells us: "The path of the just as a shining light, goeth forward and increaseth even to perfect day."

Why should charity thus grow in us? It should grow because the Christian on earth is a traveler, viator, who is advancing spiritually toward God. His spiritual advancement is made by more and more perfect acts of love, "steps of love," as St. Gregory says. We must conclude from this that charity on earth can and should always increase, otherwise the Christian would cease in a sense to be a viator; he would stop before reaching the end of his journey.³³⁸ The way is intended for travelers, not for those who stop en route and sleep. Moreover, we are told in St. Luke (6: 25): "Woe to you that are filled: for you shall hunger," but on the other hand, we read in St. Matthew (5: 6): "Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after justice, for they shall have their fill." Christ also declared: "If any man thirst, let him come to Me and drink.... Out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water."³³⁹

Since every traveler toward eternity should while on earth grow in charity, not only beginners and proficients, but the perfect ought always to draw nearer to God. And what is more, these last ought to advance toward Him so much the more rapidly as they are nearer to Him and as He draws them more strongly. St. Thomas affirms this when he comments on the words of St. Paul to the Hebrews (10: 25): "Comforting one another, and so much the more as you see the day approaching." St. Thomas writes in his commentary on this verse of the epistle: "Some one might ask why we should thus progress in faith and love. The answer is that the natural (or connatural) movement becomes so much the more rapid as it approaches its term, while it is the inverse for violent movement." (As a matter of fact, we say today that the fall of bodies is uniformly accelerated, while the inverse movement of a stone tossed into the air is uniformly retarded.) "Now," continues St. Thomas, "grace perfects and inclines to good according to the manner of nature. It follows that those who are in the state of grace ought so much the more to grow in charity as they draw near their last end (and are more attracted by it). This is why St. Paul says here: 'Not forsaking our assembly...; but comforting one another, and so much the more as you see the day approaching,' that is, the end of the journey. 'The night is past, and the day is at hand' (Rom. 13: 12). 'But the path of the just, as a shining light, goeth forward and increaseth even to perfect day'" (Prov. 4: 18).³⁴⁰

This remark thus briefly made by St. Thomas, as it were in passing, has not been as much emphasized by theologians as it deserves. It is, however, striking that St. Thomas should have noted it in so simple, so rapid, and so beautiful a manner before the discovery of the law of universal gravitation and at a time when people knew only very imperfectly (without having measured it) the acceleration of the fall of bodies. St. Thomas means that in the saints the spiritual life is more and more intensified; the movement of their souls rises to the zenith and no longer descends. For them, there is no twilight; only the body weakens with age.

Such is the law of universal attraction in the spiritual order. As bodies are attracted in direct ratio to their mass and in inverse ratio to the square of their distance, that is, they are so much the more attracted as they draw near each other; in like manner souls are drawn by God so much the more as they approach Him. Alluding to the end of His course, Christ said with this meaning: “And I, if I be lifted up from the earth (on the cross), will draw all things to Myself.”³⁴¹ “No man can come to Me, except the Father, who hath sent Me, draw him.”³⁴² The higher one rises, the more the efficient cause, which leads to action, and the final cause, which attracts to it, tend to become identified. God moves us and draws us to Himself. He is the beginning and the end of all, sovereign Good, who attracts love so much the more strongly as one draws nearer to Him. Thus, in the lives of the saints the progress of love during their last years is much more rapid than in their earlier life. They advance, not with an equal but with a quickened step, in spite of the heaviness of old age and a certain enfeebling of the sensible faculties, such as the sensible memory. Yet they hear and live the words of the psalm: “Thy youth shall be renewed like the eagle’s.”³⁴³ Grace and, in particular, charity continually grow in them.

This increasingly rapid progress existed especially in the life of the Blessed Virgin for it found no obstacle in her, and it was so much the more intense as the initial speed, or the first grace, was greater. There was in her a marvelous acceleration of the love of God, an acceleration of which that of the fall of bodies is but a remote image.

We see thus why charity ought not only to grow in us until death, but to increase more and more like a falling body, the speed of which increases until it reaches its last end.

How, then, does charity grow in us? To be sure, in its lowest degree charity already loves God above all else with a love of esteem, and its neighbor in general, without excluding anyone. In this sense it cannot have a greater extension; but it can grow in intensity, take deeper root in our will, more strongly determine its inclination to turn to God and to flee sin by more generous acts. As a matter of fact, charity does not grow by addition, like a heap of wheat.³⁴⁴ This addition would multiply charity without making it more intense. The increase would be in the order of quantity rather than of quality, which is quite a different thing.³⁴⁵ In reality, charity increases in us in so far as it becomes stronger, takes deeper root in our will, or, speaking without a metaphor, in so far as it inheres more strongly in our will and determines it more profoundly toward supernatural good by withdrawing it from evil. As in the scholar learning he comes more profound, more penetrating, more certain, without always reaching out to new conclusions, so charity grows in us by making us love God more perfectly and more purely for Himself, and our neighbor for God. If people had a better understanding of this doctrine, as St. Thomas expounds it, they would see more clearly the necessity of the passive purifications of the spirit, which St. John of the Cross speaks of. The purpose of these purifications is to free the highest virtues of all alloy, and to bring into powerful relief their formal objects: divine truth and divine goodness. Charity increases, therefore, like a quality, like heat, by becoming more intense, and that in several ways: by merit, prayer, and the sacraments.

THE INCREASE OF CHARITY BY OUR MERITS

A meritorious act is one which proceeds from charity, or from an inspired virtue vivified by charity, and which gives a right to a supernatural reward: first of all, to an increase of grace and of charity itself.

Meritorious acts do not themselves directly produce the increase of charity; for charity is not an acquired virtue produced and augmented by the repetition of acts, but it is an infused virtue. It was given to us by baptism, and as God alone can produce it in us, since it is a participation in His intimate life, He alone also can increase it. The growth of charity and the infused virtues, which are united to it, is like a continuous production. Thus St. Paul says: “I have planted (by preaching and baptism), Apollo watered, but God gave the increase. Therefore, neither he that planteth is anything, nor he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase (is all).... For we are God’s coadjutors: you are God’s husbandry; you are God’s building.”³⁴⁶ “He... will... increase the growth of the fruits of your justice.”³⁴⁷

Although our acts of charity cannot produce the increase of this virtue, they concur in it in two ways: morally, by meriting it; and physically, by preparing us to receive it. Merit is a right to a recompense; it does not produce this reward, it obtains it. By his supernatural good works the just man merits the increase of charity,³⁴⁸ as the Council of Trent defined.³⁴⁹ While awaiting the reward of heaven, the Lord gives a just man even here on earth the recompense of growing in divine love, that is, of having a stronger and purer love. Quietism, which showed a want of esteem for the divine reward under the pretext of absolute disinterestedness, forgot that the more disinterested the soul is, the more it desires this recompense: that is, more purely and

more strongly to love its God. This love is accompanied by an increase of hope, of the other infused virtues, and of the gifts of the Holy Ghost.

The acts of charity and of the virtues inspired by it do not merit, from the moral point of view, solely the increase of charity, but they dispose the soul physically to receive it, in the sense that, as it were, they open our faculties that they may receive more. They deepen them, so to speak, that the divine life may better penetrate them and elevate them while purifying them.³⁵⁰

This is true especially of intense or very fervent acts of charity. A very generous act of love of God sometimes decides a whole life and merits a great increase of charity by disposing us to receive it immediately. It is as if a person were raised to a higher level, and in this ascent he has a new view of the things of God and a new pulse. He who had two talents thus immediately obtains one or two more, perhaps an even greater number, and, as St. Thomas says, the Holy Ghost is then sent anew to us, for He becomes present in us in a new, more intimate, and more radiating manner.³⁵¹

This, however, brings up a difficult problem that has often been discussed by theologians and that is of great practical importance. Since it is clear that an intense or fervent act of charity disposes us to receive immediately an increase of this infused virtue and of all the others connected with it, it is not at all certain that a weak act of charity, an act lacking intensity and generosity (*remissus*), immediately obtains an increase of the life of grace. Does he who has five talents and acts weakly as if he had only two, obtain at once by this feeble and imperfect meritorious act an increase of charity? Several modern theologians, who follow Suarez, think so.³⁵² Such is not the thought of St. Thomas and of the early theologians in general. The holy doctor says: "Every (even imperfect) act of charity merits an increase of charity; however, this increase does not always come at once, but only when we strive generously for it."³⁵³ The reason is that the increase of sanctifying grace and of charity is conferred by God only according to the disposition of the subject who is to receive it, just as, at the moment of conversion or justification, sanctifying grace is given in a more or less elevated degree according to the fervor of the contrition of him who is converted.³⁵⁴ Evidently he who has five talents and acts as if he had only two, does not, in fact, as yet dispose himself to receive a sixth, for the act, although good, is notably inferior to the degree of virtue from which it proceeds. In this is a quite manifest analogy between supernatural acts and natural acts: a very intelligent man who is only slightly studious makes little progress in learning, whereas another who is less gifted but very hard working achieves good results. Likewise in the natural order, a friendship is strengthened only by more generous acts; very imperfect acts serve only to maintain it, not to make it grow. Therefore it seems we must conclude with St. Thomas that imperfect acts (*remissi*) of charity, although meritorious, do not at once obtain the increase of grace which they merit.³⁵⁵

This doctrine should lead us often to make generous acts of charity. We might note, in passing, that particularly on the day of the monthly retreat or the first Friday of the month, we would do well to multiply generous acts of love of God, not in a mechanical fashion, like counting them, but on every opportune occasion, in order to preserve the spirit of fervor and to avoid growing tepid. We should recall also that the Holy Ghost generally moves souls according to the degree of their infused virtues and of the seven gifts, or of their habitual docility. It would be incomprehensible that He would without reason move the soul to imperfect acts, for in that case the soul would have received in vain a high degree of infused virtue and of the gifts. Therefore, if the just man does not place an obstacle to the divine action, he will normally receive increasingly elevated graces of light and love that he may generously ascend toward God.

As good theologians teach,³⁵⁶ God is more glorified by a single act of charity of ten talents than by ten acts of charity of one talent each. Likewise a single very perfect just soul pleases God more than many others who remain in mediocrity or tepidity. Quality is superior to quantity. This is why the plenitude of grace in Mary surpassed from the first day of her existence that of all the saints, as a single diamond is worth more than a quantity of other precious stones.

Charity, therefore, ought by our merits to grow until death. With this infused virtue, our aptitude to receive a new increase grows,³⁵⁷ our spiritual heart dilates more and more, and our divine capacity is enlarged according to the words of the psalm: "I have run the way of Thy commandments, when Thou didst enlarge my heart."³⁵⁸ St. Paul also says: "Our heart is enlarged.... Be you also enlarged."³⁵⁹

We too often forget that we are en route to eternity, and we try to settle down in the present life as if it were going to last forever. We resemble those travelers who install themselves in one of the great international trains where people sleep and eat as if they were in a hotel. They sometimes forget that they are on a journey. Then they look out of the window, see the vanishing countryside, notice that the train stops and that some people are getting off, and say to themselves that they also will soon reach their destination. The present life is like one of these great trains where people forget that they are on a journey. Then some persons alight from the train, that is to say, they die, and we are reminded that we must alight also. But, although we see many persons die, we do not succeed in realizing that some day our turn will come. Let us live, on the contrary, with our eyes fixed on the end of the journey; then we shall not lose the time that is given us, and it will become more and more filled with merits for eternity.

The growth of charity, of the infused virtues, and of the gifts which accompany it, is obtained not only by merit, but by prayer. We ask daily, in fact, to grow in the love of God when we say: “Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name, Thy kingdom come (more and more in us), Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven (may we observe Thy precepts more perfectly).” The Council of Trent³⁶⁰ reminds us that this growth of the virtues is asked by the Church when it prays thus: “Increase, O Lord, our faith, hope, and charity” (Thirteenth Sunday after Pentecost).

We should recall here the difference between the prayer of petition and merit. The sinner who has lost sanctifying grace cannot merit in this state, for sanctifying grace is the radical principle of all supernatural merit. Yet, by an actual transitory grace, the sinner can pray; he can ask for the grace of conversion; and, if he asks for it with humility, confidence, and perseverance, he will obtain it. Whereas merit, which is a right to a reward, is related to divine justice, prayer is addressed to the mercy of God, which often restores fallen souls and hears their prayers without any merit on their part.³⁶¹ From the depths of the abyss into which it has fallen and where it can no longer merit, the most wretched soul may utter that cry to the divine mercy, which is prayer. The abyss of wretchedness calls to that of mercy, *abyssus abyssum invocat*, and if the sinner puts his whole heart into this appeal, he will be heard. His soul will be lifted up, and God will be glorified, as was the case with Magdalen. The impetrating power of prayer does not presuppose the state of grace, whereas merit does.

After conversion or justification, we can obtain the increase of the life of grace both by merit and by prayer. When prayer is humble, trusting, and persevering, it obtains for us a more lively faith, a firmer hope, a more ardent charity, all of which we ask for in the first three petitions of the Our Father.³⁶² The mental prayer of a just man, who delights in meditating slowly on the Our Father, in nourishing his soul profoundly with each of its petitions, in remaining at times for half an hour in the loving contemplation of one of them, is at once meritorious and impetrating.³⁶³ It gives a right to an increase of charity, from which it proceeds, and by the impetrating power of prayer it often obtains more than it merits. Besides, when mental prayer is truly fervent, it obtains this increase immediately. Thereby we see how fruitful mental prayer can be; how it draws God strongly toward us that He may give Himself intimately to us and that we may give ourselves to Him. We should often recite the beautiful prayer of Blessed Nicholas of Flue: “Lord Jesus, take me from myself, and give me to Thyself.” In it is a fervent meritorious act which immediately obtains the increase of charity that it merits, and a supplication which obtains even more than it merits. Then one’s heart dilates more and more in order to receive divine grace more abundantly; the soul empties itself of every creature and becomes more eager for God, in whom it finds in an eminent degree all that is worthy of being loved. It would be impossible to live too deeply by these things in recollection; sometimes it is given to a soul to live profoundly by them in the absolute silence of the night when everything is quiet and the soul is completely alone with its God, with its Savior, Jesus Christ. It then experiences His immense goodness and, by its mental prayer, which is at once meritorious and supplicating, it offers itself entirely to Him and receives Him in a prolonged spiritual communion that has a savor of eternal life. This is eternal life begun, as St. Thomas says.³⁶⁴ Often, therefore, the impetrating force of prayer is united to merit in order to obtain an increase of charity, a purer and stronger love of God.

Moreover, the just man may by prayer obtain certain graces which he could not merit, in particular the gift of final perseverance. This gift cannot be merited, for it is nothing other than the continuation until death of the state of grace, which is the principle of merit. Obviously it would be impossible to merit the very principle of merit.³⁶⁵ However, final perseverance or the grace of a happy death can be obtained by humble, trusting, daily prayer. For this reason the Church invites us to say daily with fervor in the second part of the Hail Mary: “Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death. Amen.” Here prayer goes farther than merit, addressing itself, not to divine justice but to infinite mercy.

We can also ask God for the grace to know Him in an ever more living and intimate manner, by that knowledge which is called infused contemplation, and which results in a closer and more fruitful union with God. In this sense the Book of Wisdom (7: 7–9) says: “I called upon God, and the spirit of wisdom came upon me: and I preferred her before kingdoms and thrones, and esteemed riches nothing in comparison of her. Neither did I compare unto her any precious stone: for all gold in comparison of her, is as a little sand, and silver in respect to her shall be counted as clay.” We find also in Ps. 54: 23: “Cast thy care upon the Lord, and He shall sustain thee: He shall not suffer the just to labor forever.” Not only will He come and sustain us, but He will come and nourish us with Himself and daily give Himself more profoundly to us. And again in Ps. 26:4 we read: “One thing I have asked of the Lord, this will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life,” that I may daily see a little more clearly that He is infinitely good to those who seek Him and to those who find Him.

By addressing infinite mercy, prayer manifestly exceeds merit. The sinner who is still incapable of meriting, may by prayer obtain the grace of conversion. By prayer, the just man often obtains graces which could not be merited, such as final perseverance and the efficacious graces which lead to it.

THE INCREASE OF THE LIFE OF GRACE THROUGH THE SACRAMENTS

Lastly, we must recall here that charity and the other infused virtues, as well as the seven gifts, grow in us through the

sacraments. The just man grows thus in the love of God through absolution and especially by Communion. The merit and prayer of the just soul obtain the gifts of God *ex opere operantis*, by reason of the faith, piety, and charity of him who merits, but the sacraments produce grace *ex opere operato* in those who do not place an obstacle to it; in other words, by themselves they produce grace from the fact that they were instituted by God to apply the merits of the Savior to us. They produce grace independently of the prayers and the merits, either of the minister who confers them or of those who receive them. This explains why a bad priest, and even an unbeliever, may validly administer baptism, provided he has the intention of doing what the Church does in conferring it.

But, although the sacraments of themselves produce grace in those who do not place an obstacle to it, they produce it more or less abundantly according to the fervor of him who receives it. The Council of Trent³⁶⁶ says that each one receives justice “according to his own measure, which the Holy Ghost distributes to everyone as He wills and according to each one’s disposition.” In the natural order, as St. Thomas observes, although an open fire of itself gives heat, a person benefits more from its influence in proportion as he draws closer to it. Likewise, in the supernatural order a person benefits so much the more from the sacraments as he approaches them with a more lively faith and a greater fervor of will. From this point of view, St. Thomas and many of the early theologians hold that, according as the sinner receives absolution with greater or less repentance, he recovers or does not recover the degree of grace which he had lost. “Now the intensity of the penitent movement,” says St. Thomas, “may be proportionate sometimes to a greater grace than that from which man fell by sinning, sometimes to an equal grace, sometimes to a lesser. Wherefore the penitent sometimes arises to greater grace than that which he had before, sometimes to an equal, sometimes to a lesser grace.”³⁶⁷ It may be that a Christian who had five talents and who loses them by mortal sin has afterward a contrition equal to only two talents; he then recovers grace in a degree notably inferior to that which he had previously. On the contrary, he may by reason of profound repentance recover grace in a more elevated degree, as was doubtless the case with St. Peter when he wept bitterly immediately after denying Christ.³⁶⁸ This teaching is of great importance in the spiritual life for those who fall in the middle of their ascent; they can rise immediately and fervently and continue their ascent from where they left off. But it is also possible that they may rise only tardily and listlessly; they then remain midway instead of continuing the ascent.

It follows also from these principles that one fervent Communion is worth more than many tepid Communions taken together. The more a person approaches with lively faith, firm hope; ardent love, and fervor of will, our Lord present in the Eucharist, radiant source of graces, the more he benefits from our Lord’s influence by graces of light, love, and strength. The Communion of St. Francis, St. Dominic, or St. Catherine of Siena was on certain days extremely fervent and proportionately fruitful; their dilated souls approached our Savior to receive abundantly and even superabundantly from Him that they might later in their apostolate give Him to other souls.

It may happen, on the contrary, that the fruit of Communion is least when a soul approaches the holy table with dispositions sufficient only not to hinder the effect of the sacrament. This should make us reflect seriously, if we show no true spiritual advancement after years of frequent or daily Communion.³⁶⁹ Possibly by reason of a growing attachment to a certain venial sin, the effect of our daily Communion may be ever weaker, as the movement of a stone thrown vertically into the air is uniformly retarded until the stone falls down. God grant that this may never be our condition!

On the contrary, we should have sufficient generosity to permit the realization in us of that superior law which is verified in the lives of the saints. In other words, because each of our Communions ought not only to preserve but to increase charity in us, each Communion should be substantially more fervent and more fruitful than, the preceding one; for each one, by increasing the love of God in us, ought to dispose us to receive our Lord on the following day with not only an equal but a superior fervor of will. Often, however, negligence and tepidity hinder the application of this law, of which that of the progressive attraction of bodies is only a symbol. Bodies are attracted to each other in increased ratio as they draw near to each other. Souls ought to make proportionately more rapid progress toward God as they draw near to Him and are more drawn by Him. Thus we see the meaning of our Savior’s words: “If any man thirst, let him come to Me and drink.... Out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water,”³⁷⁰ the streams of living water which flow into the infinite ocean that is God, known and loved as He knows and loves Himself, for all eternity.

The True Nature of Christian Perfection

So far we have spoken of the sources of the interior life, that is, of sanctifying grace, the infused virtues, the seven gifts, the Blessed Trinity which dwells in us, and the influence which Christ the Redeemer and Mary Mediatrix exert on our souls that we may grow in the love of God. We must now consider the end of the interior life, not, however, its final end, of which we spoke when we said that the interior life is, in a sense, eternal life begun;³⁷¹ but the end which may be attained on earth, the Christian perfection that may be realized here below.

We shall see, first of all, the erroneous or incomplete ideas of perfection that have been proposed, then the true nature of Christian perfection. We shall also consider the Christian perfection that is obtainable on earth, comparing it with that of heaven. Then we shall see whether it is a duty or only a counsel for all to tend to it. Next, we shall speak of the different ages of the spiritual life, and then we shall treat of each one separately. Lastly, we shall inquire whether the full perfection of Christian life on earth belongs only to the ascetical order, or whether it truly belongs to the mystical order.

ERRONEOUS OR INCOMPLETE IDEAS OF PERFECTION

To get an exact idea of the Christian perfection which the Gospel makes known to us and to see its loftiness, we shall not fail to profit by first recalling two other ideas of human perfection that have arisen according as men placed more or less stress on one form or another of their activity.

We may distinguish three principal ideas of human perfection which always tend to reappear. In antiquity the barbarians made it consist principally in fortitude. The majority of the Greek philosophers thought that it lay principally in wisdom. The Gospel tells us that it is especially in charity, or in the love of God and of our neighbor in God. These three words, fortitude, wisdom, and charity, express the dominant note in these three different conceptions of life. We shall briefly recall the first two by noting the forms they assume among us today; we shall thus better see the loftiness of the third, so much the more so as the first two contain an element of truth which, under the influence of charity, may take on great value.

The heroes of barbarian races made the perfection of man consist above all in fortitude, courage, bravery, as their legends, particularly those of the Niebelungen, remind us. The national pride of races would tend at times to bring them back to this ideal. In it is exalted the virtue of fortitude which has as its object difficult things that demand great energy and in which man's life is exposed, as in combats. An element of truth is contained in this idea, so much the more so as, in less tragic but painful and rather frequent circumstances, patience, constancy, and longanimity are needed. As St. Thomas, following Aristotle,³⁷² remarks, it is even more difficult thus to hold out, to endure for a long time, to remain firm in the midst of difficulties and blows, than it is to attack in a moment of enthusiasm. To make human perfection consist above all in fortitude, is the idea of a warrior, a soldier, an explorer, or an aviator. Often not a little pride and at times injustice is mingled in it. This idea, moreover, certainly does not suffice to put man in his true place in regard to God and his neighbor.

Some ardent souls transpose this notion into the supernatural order by purifying it, and they conceive of the Christian chiefly as a soldier of Christ, for St. Paul says: "Take unto you the armor of God that you may be able to resist in the evil day and to stand in all things perfect. Stand, therefore,... having on the breastplate of justice... taking the shield of faith, wherewith you may be able to extinguish all the fiery darts of the most wicked one."³⁷³ From this point of view, all the grandeur of martyrdom may be easily conceived.

But does its true grandeur come especially from the fact that it is an act of fortitude? Does it not rather derive, as St. Thomas says,³⁷⁴ from the fact that martyrdom is the incontestable and striking sign of great charity? The three centuries of persecution of the early Church were certainly centuries of courage, of heroic fortitude, but even more, centuries of love of God. Surely this is what distinguishes the Christian martyrs from the heroes of paganism.

From a point of view somewhat similar to that we have just discussed, some persons seem to place perfection especially in austerity, fasts, vigils, and other difficult things. This evaluation may be understood in a favorable sense in a religious order particularly vowed to prayer and immolation, or to reparation, which is a manifest sign of an ardent love of God, of real zeal. Care must be taken, however, not to place a value on austerity as such, as if it were, not a means of advancement and reparation, but an end. Were this true, the most perfect religious life would be the most austere, the most difficult, and not that life which would have the best end and the means most adapted to that end.³⁷⁵ Is what is arduous especially the proper object of virtue? This object is rather the good. Not every difficult act is morally good; at times it is a rash feat of strength. And if the

good is often difficult, it is not always so. Some acts of love of God and of our neighbor are accomplished without difficulty, with a great supernatural impulse, and are manifestly very meritorious since they proceed from great charity.

Can fortitude be the highest virtue? For the soldier as such it may be the most necessary virtue; bravery may be the perfection of the soldier. But is it the perfection of man as man, and of a Christian as a Christian? Theology answers that fortitude and patience are virtues necessary and indispensable to perfection. Above them, however, there is justice in regard to others; there is prudence, which directs all the moral virtues; and there are especially the theological virtues (faith, hope, and charity), which have God as their immediate object. This explains why martyrdom, which is an act of the virtue of fortitude, draws its grandeur chiefly from the fact that it is the sign of a great love of God.

We cannot, therefore, admit that the perfection of man and of the Christian consists chiefly in fortitude or in patience, necessary as these virtues are. Fortitude is evidently not the perfection of our intellect in regard to supreme truth, or that of our will in regard to sovereign good; it is merely virtue that represses fear in the midst of difficulties and dangers in order that we may follow right reason.

If perfect man does not consist primarily in fortitude, does it consist chiefly in wisdom? The majority of the Greek philosophers thought so. According to them, man is distinguished from lower beings by his intellect, and therefore the perfection of man as such is chiefly the perfection of his intellect, that is, the wisdom or eminent knowledge of all things by their supreme cause and last end. Perfection would thus lie in the knowledge or contemplation of the sovereign good, and in the love which springs from this knowledge. Plato, among others, even thought that it suffices to know the sovereign good in order to love it efficaciously above all, and that virtue is a science. As Aristotle³⁷⁶ remarks, this opinion did not take sufficient account of man's free will, which can deviate in spite of the knowledge of the duty to be accomplished. Nevertheless Aristotle himself placed the perfection of man in wisdom accompanied by the virtues which are subordinate to it: that is, prudence, justice, fortitude, and temperance. Wisdom, like prudence which it dominates, is, of a certainty, indispensable to perfection and to the conduct of life; but we cannot say that speculative knowledge of God, the sovereign Good, is necessarily followed by the love of God. A philosopher with a powerful intellect, though he has a correct idea of God, First Cause of the universe and Last End, may not be a good man, a man of good will. At times he may be even a very bad man. That which is true is the good of the intellect, but it is not the good of the entire man, not the whole good of man.³⁷⁷

Learning can exist without the love of God and of one's neighbor. When it does, as St. Paul says, it produces the inflation of pride by making us live for ourselves and not for God. The perfection of a professor or of a doctor, as such, is not the perfection of man as man, or of a Christian as a Christian. A good professor who teaches the humanities or the elements of philosophy with distinction is not always a good man. We should not confound the perfection of the speculative intellect with that of the entire man. The latter requires the profound rectification of the will in regard to our last end. The will is the faculty that must be directed toward the good of the entire subject, of the entire man, and not toward the good merely of the intellect.³⁷⁸ Aristotle made this observation,³⁷⁹ but it was easier to think it than to live it.

Lastly, is not the love of God here on earth superior to the knowledge of God? Knowledge draws God, in a sense, toward us by imposing on Him in a certain manner the limits of our circumscribed ideas, whereas the love of God draws us toward Him and makes us love in Him what we cannot know precisely, for we are sure that His inner life, which is hidden from us, is infinitely lovable.³⁸⁰

The conception of the Greek philosophers, which makes perfection consist in wisdom, is found again today mingled with many errors in those who put intellectual culture above everything else, and also in the theosophists, for whom perfection lies in "a consciousness of our identity with God," in the intuition of what is divine in us.³⁸¹

Far from putting the creature in his humble place beneath the Creator, theosophy presupposes pantheism, which is the negation of the order of grace and of all Christian dogmas, although it often preserves the terms of Christianity while giving them an entirely different meaning. (If a man becomes involved in theosophy, he may find himself enmeshed body and soul.) A most perfidious imitation and corruption of our asceticism and mysticism, theosophy is a product of the imagination in which God and the world are confounded, and in which we find, as we do in a novelty store, all sorts of antiques which attract our curiosity and turn our souls away from divine truth and eternal life. This heresy reminds us of the bewitching foolishness which darkens the intellect, as the Book of Wisdom says: "For the bewitching of vanity obscureth good things"³⁸²

While keeping themselves free from similar aberrations, some Christians, who have a quietist tendency, are inclined to think that a person can rapidly reach perfection by the assiduous reading of the great mystics, without concerning himself enough about practicing the virtues which these books recommend, and without remembering sufficiently that true contemplation should be completely penetrated by supernatural charity and forgetfulness of self.

Farther on we shall see that contemplation, which is an act of the intellect, is not what chiefly constitutes perfection. As will be made evident, perfection lies in union with God through charity. The loving contemplation of God is, so to speak, a means conjoined to this end; it disposes us immediately to union with God. The end toward which we must tend is not contemplation, but God Himself to be loved above all.

From all that we have just said, it follows that perfection indubitably requires fortitude, patience, abnegation, and also wisdom; indeed, all the theological and moral virtues accompanied by the seven gifts of the Holy Ghost are necessary. Does it follow that perfection consists in the ensemble of the virtues? In a sense it does, but on condition that this ensemble be ordered like an organism and that among the virtues there be one which dominates all the others, inspires, commands, animates, vivifies them, and makes all their efforts converge toward the supreme end. Is it not, then, in this supreme virtue in which all the other virtues ought to meet, that perfection chiefly consists? What is this supreme virtue?

THE ESSENCE OF PERFECTION ACCORDING TO ST. PAUL'S INTERPRETATION OF THE GOSPEL

We shall see what answer Christian revelation gives to the question just stated. In the Gospel, on several different occasions and under the most varied forms, Christ incessantly reminds us that the Supreme precept dominating all others and all the counsels is the precept of love, which had already been formulated in the Old Testament: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart and with thy whole soul and with all thy strength and with all thy mind: and thy neighbor as thyself."³⁸³ This precept is superior to the ideal of the dominating fortitude of heroes and also to the Greek philosophers' ideal of speculative wisdom. In Christ's command is a fortitude of another order and a wisdom both much more realistic and far loftier. St. Paul explains this doctrine of our Savior when he writes to the Colossians (3:12–15): "Put ye on therefore, as the elect of God, holy, and beloved, the bowels of mercy, benignity, humility, modesty, patience: bearing with one another, and forgiving one another... even as the Lord hath forgiven you... but above all these things have charity, which is the bond of perfection. And let the peace of Christ rejoice in your hearts, wherein also you are called in one body: and be ye thankful"

Charity is the bond of perfection because it is the highest of the virtues which unites our soul to God. It ought to last forever, and it vivifies all the other virtues by rendering their acts meritorious, ordaining them to the last end, that is, to its object: God loved above all else. Thus St. Paul is so convinced of this superiority of charity over all the other virtues, over the seven gifts of the Holy Ghost, and over the graces *gratis datae*, such as prophecy, that he writes:

"If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal. And if I should have prophecy and should know all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I should have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing. And if I should distribute all my goods to feed the poor, and if I should deliver my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing."³⁸⁴

Without charity, the most excellent extraordinary gifts (charismata) are of no avail for eternal life. Why is this? Because if I do not have charity, I do not fulfill the first commandment of God; I do not conform my will to His; I am turned away from Him, and my heart is set in the opposite direction from the heart of God. Therefore, "if I have not charity, I am nothing" personally in the order of salvation; I merit nothing, even though by preaching and miracles I should lead others to save their souls. With this meaning, St. Augustine says: "Love and do what you wish," and what you will do, will merit eternal life for you, if you truly love your God more than yourself. Still more, we must have true charity, for there is nothing worse than the false, which has nothing in common with genuine charity except the name.³⁸⁵

True charity, as opposed to false charity, implies all the virtues that are subordinate to it and that, from this point of view, appear as so many modalities or aspects of the love of God and of one's neighbor. This is why St. Paul says: "Charity is patient, is kind: charity envieth not, dealeth not perversely, is not puffed up, is not ambitious, seeketh not her own; is not provoked to anger, thinketh no evil; rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth with the truth; beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things."³⁸⁶

As a matter of fact, if after losing charity, we recover it by absolution, we receive with it all the infused moral virtues that are subordinate to it: Christian prudence, justice, fortitude, temperance, and the seven gifts of the Holy Ghost. To this we must add with St. Paul: "Charity never falleth away: whether prophecies shall be made void or tongues shall cease or knowledge shall be destroyed.... We see now through a glass in a dark manner; but then face to face.... And now there remain faith, hope, and charity, these three: but the greatest of these is charity."³⁸⁷ Faith will disappear to give place to vision, hope to possession, but charity will last eternally.

By charity we become the temples of the Holy Ghost: "The charity of God is poured forth in our hearts, by the Holy Ghost, who is given to us."³⁸⁸ Lastly, the more we love God, the more we know Him by that entirely supernatural, quasi-experimental knowledge that is divine wisdom. This is what made St. Paul say to the Ephesians (3: 17–19): "Being rooted and founded in charity, you may be able to comprehend with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth: to know also the charity of Christ, which surpasseth all knowledge; that you may be filled unto all the fullness of God."

St. Paul is speaking here not only to privileged souls, but to all the faithful. After meditating at length on these words in the presence of God, can we say that the infused contemplation of the mysteries of faith is not in the normal way of sanctity? Care must be taken before formulating a negative proposition of this sort, for we must remember that reality, especially the reality of the interior life such as it is willed by God, is richer than even the best of all our theories. Philosophical and theological

systems are often true in what they affirm and false in what they deny. Why is this? Because reality, as God made it, is far richer than all our limited and narrow conceptions.

“There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, Than are dreamt of in our philosophy.”³⁸⁹

To deny this would be to lose the meaning of the mystery, which is identified with contemplation. To deny it would be to impoverish singularly the words of St. Paul which we have just quoted: “Being rooted and founded in charity, you may be able to comprehend, with all the saints,” that is, with all Christians who reach perfection, “what is the breadth and length and height and depth” of the mystery of Christ... especially of His love, and “that you may be filled unto all the fullness of God.”³⁹⁰

St. John gives us the same doctrine, particularly in his First Epistle (4: 16–21): “God is charity: and he that abideth in charity, abideth in God, and God in him... And this commandment we have from God, that he who loveth God love also his brother.” Likewise St. Peter writes in his First Epistle (4: 8): “But before all things have a constant mutual charity among yourselves: for charity covereth a multitude of sins.” Christ said of Magdalen: “Many sins are forgiven her, because he hath loved much.”³⁹¹...

According to this doctrine, perfection does not consist chiefly in humility, nor does it consist especially in poverty, nor in acts of worship or of the virtue of religion, but it lies primarily in the love of God and of one’s neighbor, which renders the acts of all the other virtues meritorious. “Poverty itself,” says St. Thomas, “is not perfection, but the means of perfection.... But since the means are sought not for their own sake, but for the sake of the end, a thing is better, not for being a greater instrument, but for being more adapted to the end. Thus a physician does not heal the more, the more medicine he gives, but the more the medicine is adapted to the disease.”³⁹²

As much must be said of humility, which makes us bow before God that we may with docility receive His influence, which ought to lift us up to Him.³⁹³

The virtue of religion, which renders to God the worship due Him, is also inferior to the theological virtues; it is meritorious only by reason of the charity that animates it.³⁹⁴ If we should forget this, we would perhaps become more attentive to worship, to the liturgy, than to God Himself, to the figures rather than to the reality, to the manner in which we ought to say an Our Father or a Credo rather than to the sublime meaning of these prayers: the service of God would take precedence over the love of God. Hence our conclusion is that, according to Christian revelation, charity is “the bond of perfection.”

SOME EXACT THEOLOGICAL STATEMENTS ON THE NATURE OF PERFECTION

The scriptural teaching which we have just recalled assumes a more precise form in the doctrinal body of theology. Relying on the Scriptures, St. Thomas easily establishes the fact that Christian perfection consists especially in charity. “A thing is said to be perfect,” he says, “in so far as it attains its proper end, which is the ultimate perfection thereof. Now it is charity that unites us to God, who is the last end of the human mind, since ‘he that abideth in charity abideth in God, and God in him’ (I John 4: 16). Therefore the perfection of the Christian life consists chiefly in charity.”³⁹⁵

Infused faith and hope could evidently not be that in which perfection chiefly consists, for they can exist in the state of mortal sin, in a man whose will is turned away from God, his last end. They remain in him like the root of a tree which has been cut down and can revive. Not every mortal sin, in fact, makes a man lose faith and hope, but only a mortal sin that is directly contrary to these virtues. When the sinner who continues to believe and who still hopes, recovers charity, it revivifies faith and hope, and renders their acts not only salutary but meritorious, by ordaining them to God efficaciously loved above all else. St. Thomas adds farther on: “Primarily and essentially, the perfection of the Christian life consists in charity, principally as to the love of God, secondarily as to the love of our neighbor, both of which are the matter of the chief commandments of the divine law.... Secondarily and instrumentally, however, perfection consists in the observance of the counsels.”³⁹⁶ The great sign of the love of God is precisely love of one’s neighbor. Christ Himself says so, and we cannot insist too strongly on this point: “A new commandment I give unto you: That you love one another, as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this shall all men know that you are My disciples, if you have love one for another.”³⁹⁷ This love of our neighbor is the great sign of the progress of the love of God in our hearts, so much so that St. John adds: “He that saith he is in the light, and hateth his brother, is in darkness even until now.”³⁹⁸ “We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren.... Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer.”³⁹⁹

Farther on we shall speak of the counsels of poverty, chastity, and obedience; but even now it is clear that they are subordinate to charity, to the love of God and of one’s neighbor in God.

We should like to insist here on two points that show the difference between Christian perfection on earth and perfection in heaven.

THE SUPERIORITY OF CHARITY TO THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD IN THIS LIFE

Some intellectuals raise an objection to the traditional doctrine, based on Scripture, according to which perfection consists

primarily in charity. They ask whether the intellect is not the first faculty of man, the one which directs the others and which primarily distinguishes us from the animal. Since this is true, they say, should we not then conclude that the perfection of man lies chiefly in the intellectual knowledge that he can have of all things, considered in their principle and in their end, and therefore in the knowledge of God, the supreme rule of human life? From this point of view, a Bossuet may seem to surpass a number of canonized servants of God who did not particularly excel in intelligence, as for example, a holy lay brother or a St. Benedict Joseph Labre.

We have already virtually cleared up this objection by pointing out in one of our previous chapters that speculative and abstract knowledge of God can exist without being accompanied by profound righteousness of the will. It may exist in a very intelligent but heartless man, who could not be called “a man of good will” in the meaning given to this term by the Gospel. For the same reason, infused faith can remain in a soul that has lost charity and has turned away from God. Moreover, we said with St. Thomas, that on earth the love of God is better than the knowledge of God.⁴⁰⁰ It is important to insist on this point. St. Thomas clearly recognizes that the intellect is superior to the will which it directs. The intellect has, in fact a more simple, more absolute, more universal object, being in all its universality, and consequently all beings; the will has a more restricted object, the good, which is a modality of being, and which is in everything the perfection that renders it desirable. Besides, we must not confound apparent good with true good, which the intellect recognizes and judges, and proposes to the will. As the good presupposes the true and being, the will presupposes the intellect and is directed by it. Therefore by the intellect, which is the first of his faculties, man differs primarily from the animal.

St. Thomas admits also that in heaven our beatitude will consist essentially in the beatific vision, in the intellectual and immediate vision of the divine essence, for it is above all by this immediate vision that we shall take possession of God for eternity. We shall plunge the gaze of our intellect into the depths of His inner life seen directly. God will thus give Himself immediately to us, and we shall give ourselves to Him. We shall possess Him and He will possess us, because we shall know Him as He knows Himself and as He knows us. Beatific love will be in us a consequence of this immediate vision of the divine essence; it will even be a necessary consequence, for the beatific love of God will no longer be free, but superfree, above liberty. Our will will be invincibly ravished by the attraction of God seen face to face. We shall see His infinite goodness and beauty so clearly that we shall be unable not to love Him; we shall even be unable to find any pretext of momentarily interrupting this act of superfree love, which will no longer be measured by time, but by participated eternity, by the single instant of the immobile duration of God, the instant that never passes. In heaven the love of God and the joy of possessing Him will necessarily follow the beatific vision, which will thus be the essence of our beatitude.⁴⁰¹ All this is true. It is difficult to affirm more strongly than St. Thomas does the superiority of the intellect over the will in principle and in the perfect life of heaven.

Since this is true, how can the holy doctor maintain that Christian perfection on earth consists primarily in charity, which is a virtue of the will, and not in wisdom or contemplation, which belong to the intellect? To this question he gives a profound answer, which should be meditated on for the spiritual life. He says in substance: Although a faculty may by its nature be superior to another, it may happen that an act of the second is superior to an act of the first. For example, sight is superior to hearing, it is less painful to be deaf than blind; nevertheless, although sight is superior to hearing, the audition of a Beethoven symphony is more sought after than the sight of an ordinary object. Likewise, although the intellect by its very nature (simpliciter) superior to the will which it directs, here on earth the love of God is more perfect than the knowledge of God.⁴⁰² Therefore perfection lies chiefly in the love of God. A saint who has little learning in theological matters but who has a very great love of God, is certainly more perfect than a theologian who has a lesser charity. This observation, which is elementary for every Christian, appears upon serious reflection as a lofty and precious truth. It could be illustrated by many quotations from Scripture and from the works of the great spiritual writers, especially from *The Imitation of Christ*.

Whence comes this superiority of the love of God over the knowledge of Him that we have on earth? St. Thomas answers as follows: “The action of the intellect consists in this, that the idea of the thing understood is in the one who understands; whereas the act of the will consists in this, that the will is inclined to the thing as existing in itself. And therefore the Philosopher says (Metaph., VI) that good and evil, which are objects of the will, are in things, but truth and error, which are objects of the intellect, are in the mind.”⁴⁰³ It follows that on earth our knowledge of God is inferior to the love of God, since, as St. Thomas further says,⁴⁰⁴ when we know God, we draw Him in a way to ourselves, and in order to represent Him to ourselves, we impose on Him the bounds of our limited ideas; whereas when we love Him, it is we who are drawn to Him, lifted up to Him, such as He is in Himself. An act of love of God made by the Cure of Ars as he taught catechism, was worth more than a learned theological meditation inspired by a lesser love. Our knowledge of God draws Him to us, whereas our love of God draws us to Him. Therefore, as long as we have not the beatific vision, that is, while we are on earth or in purgatory, the love of God is more perfect than the knowledge of God. It presupposes this knowledge, but it surpasses it.

Further, says St. Thomas, even here on earth our love of charity attains God immediately;⁴⁰⁵ it adheres immediately to Him, and from Him it goes on to creatures. “For knowledge begins from Charity ought, therefore, incontestably to have the first place

in our soul, above that of the love of knowledge and of any kind of human progress. Moreover, charity will increase tenfold all our moral and intellectual powers by placing them in the service of God and of our neighbor. The love of esteem (*appretiative summus*) which we ought to have for God will thus become more intense, as it should.^{406, 407, 408}

THE LOVE OF CHARITY CANNOT BE ABSOLUTELY CONTINUAL ON EARTH AS IT WILL BE IN HEAVEN

In comparing Christian perfection on earth with that of heaven, St. Thomas observes⁴⁰⁹ that God alone can love Himself infinitely as much as He is lovable, as He alone can have a comprehensive vision of His essence. However, without loving God as much as He is lovable, the saints in heaven love Him with all their strength with an ever actual, uninterrupted love. This absolute continuity in love is not possible on earth; sleep, in particular, does not permit it.

The perfection possible on earth excludes everything that is contrary to the love of God, that is, mortal sin, and also all that hinders our love from being completely directed toward God. Thus those of the just who are called beginners and proficients tend toward this union with God, which is the possession of the perfect.⁴¹⁰

According to these principles formulated by St. Thomas, the perfection of charity in the perfect excludes not only mortal sin and fully deliberate venial sin, but also voluntary imperfections, such as a lesser generosity in the service of God and the habit of acting in an imperfect manner (*remissa*) and of receiving the sacraments with little fervor of will. He who has a charity equal to five talents and acts as if he had only two talents still performs meritorious but weak acts. These acts of charity, called *remissi*, do not immediately obtain the increase of charity that they deserve,⁴¹¹ and are not proper to the perfect, who ought indeed ever to ‘advance more rapidly toward God, for the nearer souls approach Him, the more they are drawn by Him.’⁴¹²

St. Thomas⁴¹³ points out also that in the perfect, charity toward one’s neighbor, the great sign of our love of God, extends not only to all in general, but as soon as the occasion presents itself to each of those with whom the perfect have relations, not only to friends but to strangers and even to adversaries. Moreover, this fraternal charity is intense in them, reaching even to the sacrifice of exterior goods and of life itself for the salvation of souls, since Christ said: “This is My commandment, that you love one another, as I have loved you.”⁴¹⁴ We see this charity in the apostles after Pentecost, when they were “rejoicing that they were accounted worthy to suffer reproach for the name of Jesus.”⁴¹⁵ This is also what made St. Paul say: “But I most gladly will spend and be spent myself for your souls.”⁴¹⁶

Perfect charity demands serious effort, a veritable struggle, a spirit of abnegation or renunciation, in order that our affection, ceasing to descend toward the things of earth or to fall back egoistically on ourselves, may always rise more purely and strongly toward God. For this ascent toward God we need prayer, habitual recollection, a great docility to the Holy Ghost, and the generous acceptance of the cross which purifies. As soon as the soul’s life ceases to descend, it ascends toward God. It cannot remain stationary on earth; and its law, like that of the flame which symbolizes it, is not the law of descent, but of ascent. Therefore, without having the absolute continuity of the love of heaven, the charity of the perfect on earth is characterized by an admirable and almost ceaseless activity.

The author of *The Imitation* admirably expresses this thought when he says: “Because I am as yet weak in love and imperfect in virtue, therefore do I stand in need of being strengthened and comforted by Thee. Wherefore do Thou visit me often, and instruct me in Thy holy discipline.... A great thing is love, a great good in every way, which alone lighteneth all that is burdensome and beareth equally all that is unequal. It carrieth a burden without being burdened, and maketh all else that is bitter sweet and savory. The noble love of Jesus impelleth us to do great things, and exciteth us always to desire that which is the more perfect. Love will tend upwards and not be detained by things beneath. Love will be at liberty, and free from all worldly affection that its interior vision be not hindered; that it suffer itself not to be entangled with any temporal interest, or cast down by misfortune. Nothing is sweeter than love, nothing stronger, nothing higher, nothing wider, nothing more pleasant... for love is born of God, and cannot rest but in God, above all created things. The lover flieth, runneth, and rejoiceth; he is free, and cannot be restrained. He giveth all for all, and hath all in all; because he resteth in one sovereign Good above all, from whom all good floweth and proceedeth.... Love often knoweth no measure, but groweth fervent above all measure.... Love watcheth, and sleeping slumbereth not. When weary it is not tired;... but like a vivid flame and a burning torch, it mounteth upward and securely passeth through all”⁴¹⁷

This is truly the life of the saints. We are called to it, for we are all called to the life of heaven where there will be only saints. In order to attain it, we must sanctify all the acts of our day, remembering that above the succession of daily deeds, whether pleasurable or painful, foreseen or unforeseen, there is the parallel series of actual graces which are granted to us from moment to moment that we may draw the best spiritual profit from these daily deeds. If we think about this, we shall no longer see these acts only from the point of view of the senses, or from that of our reason which is more or less led astray by self-love, but from the supernatural point of view of faith. Then these daily deeds, whether pleasurable or painful, will become the practical application of the doctrine of the Gospel, and gradually an almost continual conversation will be established between Christ and us. This will be the true interior life, as it were, eternal life begun.

The Grandeur of Christian Perfection and the Beatitudes

Christian perfection, according to the testimony of the Gospels and Epistles, consists chiefly in charity which unites us to God.⁴¹⁸ This virtue corresponds to the supreme precept of the love of God. We read also: “He that abideth in charity abideth in God, and God in him.”⁴¹⁹ “But above all these things have charity, which is the bond of perfection.”⁴²⁰

Some theologians have questioned whether for perfection, properly so called, not that of beginners or of proficients, but that which characterizes the unitive way, a great charity is necessary, or whether this perfection can be obtained without a lofty degree of this virtue. Some authors doubt it.⁴²¹ They even declare that a high degree of charity is not necessary to perfection, properly so called, because, according to the testimony of St. Thomas, “the very least grace is sufficient to resist any degree of concupiscence.”⁴²²

The majority of theologians answer, on the contrary, that perfection, properly so called, is obtained only after long exercise of the acquired and infused virtues, an exercise by which their intensity increases.⁴²³ Before reaching the age of perfection, the perfect man must have been a beginner, then a proficient. In the perfect man, not only can charity conquer many temptations, but it has in fact triumphed over many, and has thereby notably increased. Therefore Christian perfection, properly so called, that of the unitive way, cannot be conceived without a lofty charity.⁴²⁴

If we were to read the contrary in the works of St. John of the Cross, for example, we would think we were dreaming and that there was a typographical error. It seems altogether certain that, as for adult age greater physical strength is needed than for childhood (although accidentally certain particularly vigorous adolescents may be stronger than certain adults), likewise for the state of the perfect a loftier charity is also needed than for that of beginners (although accidentally certain saints have a greater charity at the beginning than certain perfect souls already advanced in age).

The common teaching of theologians on this point seems clearly founded on the very preaching of the Savior, especially that of the beatitudes found in the fifth chapter of St. Matthew’s Gospel. This page of the Gospel admirably expresses all the elevation of Christian perfection to which Christ calls all of us. The Sermon on the Mount is the abridgment of Christian doctrine, the solemn promulgation of the New Law, given to perfect the Mosaic Law and to correct erroneous interpretations of it; and the eight beatitudes given at its beginning, are the abridgment of this sermon. They thus wonderfully condense all that constitutes the ideal of the Christian life and show all its loftiness.

Christ’s first preaching promised happiness and showed the means to obtain it. Why does He speak first of all of happiness? Because all men naturally wish to be happy. They pursue this end unceasingly, whatever they may wish; but they often seek happiness where it is not, where they will find only wretchedness. Let us listen to our Lord, who tells us where true and lasting happiness is, where the end of our life is, and who gives us the means to obtain it.

The end is indicated in each of the eight beatitudes. Under different names, it is eternal happiness, whose prelude the just may enjoy even here on earth; it is the kingdom of heaven, the promised land, perfect consolation, the full satisfaction of all our holy and legitimate desires, supreme mercy, the sight of God our Father. The means are quite the contrary of those suggested by the maxims of worldly wisdom, which proposes an entirely different end.

St. Augustine and St. Thomas admirably explain the order of these eight beatitudes. An ascending order, it is the inverse of that of the Our Father, which descends from the consideration of the glory of God to that of our personal needs and of our daily bread.

The first three beatitudes tell the happiness that is found in the flight from sin and deliverance from it, in poverty accepted for love of God, in meekness, and in the tears of contrition. The two following beatitudes are those of a Christian’s active life: they correspond to the thirst for justice and to mercy exercised toward one’s neighbor. Then come those of the contemplation of the mysteries of God: the purity of heart which prepares the soul to see God, and the peace which springs from true wisdom. Finally, the last and most perfect of the beatitudes unites all the preceding ones in the very midst of persecution endured for justice’ sake. These are the final trials, the condition of sanctity.⁴²⁵

We shall follow this ascending order to get a precise idea of Christian perfection, taking care not to lessen it. We shall see that Christian perfection goes beyond the limits of asceticism, or of the exercise of the virtues according to our own activity, and that it implies the eminent exercise of the gifts of the Holy Ghost. The superhuman mode of the gifts, when it becomes frequent and manifest, characterizes the mystical life, or the life of docility to the Holy Ghost.

Following St. Augustine, St. Thomas teaches that the beatitudes are acts proceeding from the Holy Ghost or from the virtues perfected by the gifts.⁴²⁶

The beatitudes of the deliverance from sin correspond to the purgative way, which is proper to beginners and which is prolonged in the way the proficient and the perfect ought to follow. Whereas the world declares that happiness is in the abundance of exterior goods, of riches, and in honors, Christ states without any other preamble, with the calm assurance of absolute truth: "Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

Each beatitude has many degrees. Happy they who are poor without murmuring, without impatience, without jealousy, even if bread should be lacking, and who work while placing their trust in God. Blessed are they who, though more fortunate, have not the spirit of riches, pomp, and pride, but are detached from the goods of earth. More fortunate still are they who will leave all to follow Christ, who will make themselves voluntarily poor, and who will truly live according to the spirit of this vocation. They will receive the hundredfold on earth and eternal life. These poor are they who, under the inspiration of the gift of fear, follow the road which, though narrow at first, becomes the royal road to heaven, on which the soul dilates more and more, whereas the broad road of the world leads to hell and perdition. Elsewhere Christ declares: "Woe to you that are filled: for you shall hunger."⁴²⁷ On the other hand, blessed is that poverty which, as the life of St. Francis of Assisi shows, opens the kingdom of God that is infinitely superior to all wealth, to the miserable riches in which the world seeks happiness.

Blessed are the poor, or humble of heart, who do not cling to the goods of the body, or to those of the spirit, or to reputation, or to honor, and who seek only the kingdom of God.

The desire of riches divides men, engenders quarrels, lawsuits, violence, and war among nations; but Christ says: "Blessed are the meek, for they shall possess the land." Blessed are they who do not become irritated against their brethren, who do not seek to take vengeance on their enemies, to dominate others. "If one strike thee on thy right cheek, turn to him also the other."⁴²⁸ Blessed are the meek who do not judge rashly, who do not see in their neighbor a rival to be supplanted but a brother to be helped, a child of the same heavenly Father. The gift of piety inspires this meekness in us with a filial affection toward God our common Father. The meek are not stubbornly attached to their own judgment; they express themselves quite simply in a straightforward manner, and do not feel the need to call heaven to witness in trivial matters.⁴²⁹

To be thus supernaturally meek, even with those who are acrimonious, demands a great union with Him who said: "Learn of Me, for I am meek and humble of heart"; with Him who did not crush the broken reed or extinguish the smoking flax. According to Bossuet, the broken reed is sometimes our angry neighbor, who is broken by his own anger. We must not crush him by taking vengeance on him. Christ has been compared to the lamb which lets itself be led to the slaughter without uttering a complaint.

The meekness we are discussing is not that which does not offend anyone because it is afraid of everything; rather, it is a virtue which presupposes a great love of God and of one's neighbor, the flower of charity, as St. Francis de Sales says. This meekness doubles the value of the service rendered. Moreover, it succeeds in stating the whole truth, in making counsel and even reproaches acceptable; for he who receives them feels that they are inspired by a great love. Blessed are the meek, for they shall possess the land, the true, promised land. Even now they possess spiritually the hearts that trust in them.

Whereas the world says that happiness lies in pleasures, Christ declares: "Blessed are they that mourn; for they shall be comforted." To the evil rich man it was said: "Thou didst receive good things in thy lifetime, and likewise Lazarus evil things; but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented."⁴³⁰ Blessed are they who, like the beggar Lazarus, suffer patiently without consolation from men, for their tears are seen by God. More blessed still are those who weep for their sins, and through an inspiration of the gift of knowledge know experimentally that sin is the greatest of evils, and by their tears obtain its pardon. Lastly, more blessed, says St. Catherine of Siena,⁴³¹ are those who weep for love at the sight of the infinite mercy, of the goodness of the Savior, of the tenderness of the Good Shepherd, who sacrifices Himself for His sheep. These receive even here on earth consolation infinitely superior to that which the world can give.

Such are the beatitudes which are found in the flight and deliverance from sin.

THE BEATITUDES OF THE ACTIVE LIFE OF THE CHRISTIAN

There are other holy joys which the just man finds when, freed from evil, he seeks the good with his whole heart. The man of action, who allows himself to be carried away by pride, declares that happy is that man who lives and acts as he pleases, who is not subject to anyone, and who imposes his will on others. Christ says: "Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after justice: for they shall have their fill." Justice, in the broad sense of the word, consists in rendering to God what is due Him, and then for the love of God giving also to the creature what is due him. In recompense, the Lord gives Himself to us. This is the perfect order, in perfect obedience that is inspired by love which enlarges the heart. Blessed are they who desire this justice, even to the extent of hungering and thirsting for it. In a certain sense, they will be filled even in this life by becoming more just and more holy. This is a blessed thirst, for Christ says: "If any man thirst, let him come to Me and drink. He that believeth in Me, as the Scripture saith: Out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water."⁴³² That we may keep this thirst when sensible enthusiasm falls away, and preserve this hunger and thirst for justice in the midst of contradictions, hindrances, and

disillusions, we must receive with docility the inspirations of the gift of fortitude. This gift prevents us from weakening, from letting ourselves be disheartened, and it lifts up our courage in the midst of difficulties. St. Thomas says: "The Lord wishes to see us hunger and thirst for this justice to such an extent that we can never be satiated in this life, as the miser never has enough gold." These hungering souls "will be satiated only in the eternal vision, and on this earth in spiritual goods.... When men are in the state of sin, they do not experience this spiritual hunger: when they are free from all sin, then they experience it."⁴³³

In a Christian's action this hunger and thirst for justice should not be accompanied by a bitter zeal toward the guilty. Therefore Christ adds: "Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy." In our life, as also in that of God, justice and mercy should be united. We cannot be perfect without going to the help of the afflicted, of the sick, as the good Samaritan did. The Lord will give the hundredfold to those who give a glass of water for love of Him, to those inviting to their table the poor, the crippled, the blind, who are mentioned in the parable of the guests. The Christian should be happier to give than to receive. He ought to pardon offenses, that is, to give to those who have offended him more than is due them; he ought to forget insults and, before offering his gift at the altar, go and be reconciled with his brother. The gift of counsel inclines us to mercy, makes us attentive to the sufferings of others, makes us find the true remedy, the word that consoles and uplifts.

If our activity were frequently inspired by these two virtues of justice and mercy and by the gifts corresponding to them, our souls would find even here on earth a holy joy and would be truly disposed to enter into the intimacy of God.

THE BEATITUDES OF CONTEMPLATION AND UNION WITH GOD

Some philosophers have thought that happiness lies in the knowledge of truth, especially of supreme truth. This was the teaching of Plato and Aristotle. They were but little preoccupied with purity of heart, and their lives, on more than one point, were in contradiction with their doctrine. Christ tells us: "Blessed are the clean of heart: for they shall see God." He does not say that those are blessed who have received a powerful intellect, who have the leisure and means to cultivate it; but rather, blessed are the clean of heart, even though they may be naturally less endowed than many others. If they are clean of heart, they shall see God. A truly clean heart is like the limpid waters of a lake in which the azure of the sky is reflected, or like a spiritual mirror in which the image of God is reproduced.

That the heart may be pure, a generous mortification is prescribed: "If thy right eye scandalize thee, pluck it out.... If thy right hand scandalize thee, cut it off."⁴³⁴ We must particularly watch over purity of intention: for example, not giving alms through ostentation, not praying to draw upon ourselves the esteem of men, but seeking only the approbation of "the Father who seeth in secret." Then will be realized the words of the Master: "If thy eye be single, thy whole body shall be lightsome."⁴³⁵

Even here on earth, the Christian will, in a sense, see God in his neighbor, even in souls that at first seem opposed to God. The Christian will see God in holy Scripture, in the life of the Church, in the circumstances of his own life, and even in trials, in which he will find lessons on the ways of Providence as a practical application of the Gospel. Under the inspiration of the gift of understanding, this is the true contemplation which prepares us for that by which, properly speaking, we shall see God face to face, His goodness, and His infinite beauty. Then all our desires will be gratified, and we shall be inebriated with a torrent of spiritual delights.

This contemplation of God ought, even here on earth, to be fruitful. It gives peace, a radiating peace, as the seventh beatitude says: "Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God." According to St. Augustine and St. Thomas, this beatitude corresponds to the gift of wisdom, which makes us taste the mysteries of salvation and see, so to speak, all things in God. The inspirations of the Holy Ghost, to which this gift renders us docile, gradually manifest to us the wonderful order of the providential plan even in those things, and at times especially in those things, which at first disconcerted us, in the painful and unforeseen events permitted by God for a higher good. One could not thus perceive the designs of Providence, which directs our lives, without experiencing peace, which is the tranquillity of order.

That we may not be troubled by painful and unexpected events, that we may receive all from the hand of God as a means or an occasion of going to Him, we need great docility to the Holy Ghost, who wishes to give us progressively the contemplation of divine things, the requisite for union with God. Hence we received in baptism the gift of wisdom, which has grown in us by confirmation and frequent Communion. The inspirations of the gift of wisdom give us a radiating peace, not only for ourselves but for our neighbor. They make us peacemakers; they help us to calm troubled souls, to love our enemies, to find the words of reconciliation which put an end to strifes. This peace, which the world cannot give, is the mark of the true children of God, who never lose the thought of their Father in heaven. St. Thomas even says of these beatitudes: "They are a kind of preparation for future happiness."⁴³⁶

Lastly, in the eighth beatitude, the most perfect of all, Christ shows that all He has said is greatly confirmed by affliction borne with love: "Blessed are they that suffer persecution for justice' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." The final trials especially, the requisites for sanctity, are indicated here.

Christ's surprising statement had never been heard before. Not only does it promise future happiness, but it declares that a

soul should consider itself happy even in the midst of afflictions and persecutions suffered for justice. This is an altogether supernatural beatitude, which is practically understood only by souls enlightened by God. There are, moreover, many spiritual degrees in this state, from that of the good Christian who begins to suffer for having acted well, obeyed, and given good example, up to the martyr who dies for the faith. This beatitude applies to those who, converted to a better life, encounter only opposition in their surroundings. It applies also to the apostle whose action is hindered by the very people he wishes to save, when they will not pardon him for having spoken the Gospel truth too clearly. Entire countries sometimes endure this persecution, such as the Vendee during the French Revolution, Armenia, Poland, Mexico, and Spain.

This beatitude is the most perfect because it is that of those who are most clearly marked in the image of Jesus crucified. To remain humble, meek, and merciful in the midst of persecution, even toward persecutors, and in this torment not only to preserve peace but to communicate it to others, is truly the full perfection of Christian life. It is realized especially in the last trials undergone by perfect souls which God purifies by making them work for the salvation of their neighbor. All the saints have not been martyrs, but they have, in varying degrees, suffered persecution for justice' sake, and they have known something of that martyrdom of the heart which made Mary the Mother of Sorrows.

Christ insists on the reward promised to those who thus suffer for justice: "Blessed are ye when they shall revile you, and persecute you, and speak all that is evil against you, untruly, for My sake. Be glad and rejoice, for your reward is very great in heaven." These words of Christ kindled in the souls of the apostles the desire for martyrdom, a desire which inspired the sublime utterances of St. Andrew and St. Ignatius of Antioch. These words live again in St. Francis of Assisi, St. Dominic, and St. Benedict Joseph Labre. Inspired by these words, these saints were "the salt of the earth," "the light of the world," and they built their houses not on sand but on rock, houses that have been able to weather all storms and have not been overthrown.

These beatitudes, which, as St. Thomas says,⁴³⁷ are the superior acts of the gifts or of the virtues perfected by the gifts, go beyond simple asceticism and belong to the mystical order. In other words, the full perfection of Christian life belongs normally to the mystical order; it is the prelude of the life of heaven, where the Christian will be "perfect as the heavenly Father is perfect," seeing Him as He sees Himself and loving Him as He loves Himself.

St. Teresa writes: "They read that we must not be troubled when men speak ill of us, that we are to be then more pleased than when they speak well of us; that we must despise our own good name, be detached from our kindred... with many other things of the same kind. The disposition to practice this must be, in my opinion, the gift of God; for it seems to me a supernatural good."⁴³⁸ In other words, this disposition goes beyond simple asceticism or the exercise of the virtues according to our own activity or industry; it is the fruit of a great docility to the inspirations of the Holy Ghost. Moreover, the saint says: "If a soul loves honors and temporal goods, it is in vain that it will have practiced prayer or rather meditation for many years; it will never advance very much. Perfect prayer, on the contrary, frees the soul from these defects."⁴³⁹ This is equivalent to saying that without perfect prayer a soul will never reach the full perfection of Christian life.

The author of *The Imitation* also expresses the same idea when speaking of true peace: "If thou arrive at an entire contempt of thyself, know that then thou shalt enjoy an abundance of peace, as much as is possible in this thy earthly sojourn."⁴⁴⁰ This is why, in the same book of *The Imitation*, the disciple asks for the superior grace of contemplation: "I stand much in need of a grace yet greater, if I must arrive so far that it may not be in the power of any man nor anything created to hinder me.... He was desirous to fly freely to Thee who said, 'Who will give me wings like a dove, and I will fly and be at rest?' (Ps. 44:7.)... Unless a man be disengaged from all things created, he cannot freely attend to things divine. And this is the reason why there are found so few contemplative persons, because there are few that know how to secure themselves entirely from perishable creatures. For this a great grace is required, such as may elevate the soul, and lift it above itself. And unless a man be elevated in spirit, and free from attachment to all creatures, and wholly united to God, whatever he knows and whatever he has is of no great importance."⁴⁴¹ This chapter of *The Imitation* belongs, properly speaking, to the mystical order; it shows that only therein is the true perfection of the love of God found.

St. Catherine of Siena speaks in the same way in her *Dialogue*.⁴⁴² As we have seen, this is the very teaching given us by Christ in the beatitudes, especially as St. Augustine⁴⁴³ and St. Thomas understood them, that is, as the elevated acts of the gifts of the Holy Ghost or of the virtues perfected by the gifts. This is truly the full normal development of the spiritual organism or of "the grace of the virtues and the gifts." The beatitudes show it to us, not in an abstract and theoretical form, but in a concrete, practical, and vital manner.

Perfection and Heroic Virtue

To COMPLETE what we have said about the grandeur or elevation of Christian perfection, we must see whether it essentially demands great charity and the practice of the virtues even to a heroic degree.

DOES PERFECTION NECESSARILY REQUIRE GREAT CHARITY?

Certain theologians, such as Suarez,⁴⁴⁴ have maintained that one can be perfect without great charity.⁴⁴⁵ This proposition would greatly astonish us if we were to find it in the works of St. Thomas or of St. John of the Cross, for it seems little in conformity with their principles. Yet it has been defended because, it has been said, the weakest charity can, according to St. Thomas, overcome all temptations, and because what is lacking in the intensity of charity can easily be supplied by the acquired virtues. Thus, according to this opinion, a person may be perfect without having great charity, and inversely he who has great charity may not be perfect, because he does not sufficiently govern his passions.

The common teaching is, on the contrary, that Christian perfection requires great charity. Why is this? The reason lies in the fact that perfection is obtained only after long exercise of the infused and the acquired virtues, an exercise by which these virtues increase more and more. And if at the beginning, “the weakest charity could overcome all temptations,”⁴⁴⁶ as time goes on it triumphs over them effectively and becomes more and more intense. It is inconceivable, therefore, that a Christian be perfect, that is, superior to beginners and proficients, without having great charity.

Nevertheless, perfection does not require a fixed intense degree of charity, as if mathematically determined and known to God alone. We do not find here the mathematical precision which is observed for the point of fusion of such or such bodies. We must judge spiritual perfection by analogy with maturity, which normally requires more physical strength than adolescence, without, however, exacting a mathematically determined degree of strength.

Moreover, this doctrine is based on the fact that charity increases, properly speaking, intensively rather than extensively.⁴⁴⁷ Intact, even the slightest charity ought to extend to God and to all men, at least vaguely, without excluding anyone. Finally, we have seen that, according to St. Thomas, the three degrees of charity proper to beginners, proficients, and the perfect, are degrees of the intensity of this infused virtue, which more and more excludes deliberate venial sins and detaches us from earthly things in order to unite us more strongly to God. Thence it follows that Christian perfection essentially requires (*per se loquendo et non solum per accidens*) great charity.

But it may happen accidentally that a certain perfect Christian has a lesser degree of charity than a great saint has at the outset. St. Mary Magdalen could, immediately after her conversion, already have a higher charity than many perfect souls called to a lesser sanctity. Likewise in the corporeal order, it may happen accidentally that a certain especially vigorous youth is stronger than many grown men. But if it is a question of maturity in general and of perfection as such, prescind from a given individual, it must be said that normally they require powers superior to the preceding age. It should also be observed that, with the same degree of habitual charity, one man avoids venial sin more than another, whether it is because the first has more actual generosity, or because he has fewer difficulties in his temperament, less work, fewer contradictions from men. St. Teresa remarks that, when she left her monastery to make a foundation, it happened that in the midst of unforeseen circumstances she committed more venial faults but also acquired more merits because of the difficulties to be overcome. The same is true when a man climbs a mountain: he stumbles from time to time, which he scarcely ever does on a level road, but he has the merit of a difficult ascent.

All these reasons show that, although accidentally a certain perfect soul may have a lesser charity than a certain beginner called to very high sanctity, perfection essentially requires great charity. It is obtained only after the conquering of many temptations and the acquiring of many merits. We read in the Book of Tobias (12: 13) :

“Because thou wast acceptable to God, it was necessary that temptation should prove thee.” The Scriptures also say: “The furnace trieth the potter’s vessels; and the trial of affliction just men.”⁴⁴⁸ And our Lord says at the end of the Sermon on the Mount: “Everyone therefore that heareth these My words, and doth them, shall be likened to a wise man that built his house upon a rock. And the rain fell and the floods came and the winds blew; and they beat upon that house. And it fell not, for it was founded on a rock.”⁴⁴⁹ These words show that, although a weak charity can resist temptations, it is actually victorious over them only by increasing and becoming stronger and stronger. Therefore true Christian perfection of itself requires great charity. This truth is evident from the principles commonly accepted.

The teaching of St. John of the Cross confirms this doctrine. In *The Ascent of Mount Carmel*⁴⁵⁰ he writes as follows:

Some consider any kind of retirement from the world and any correction of excesses to be sufficient; others are content with a certain degree of virtue, persevere in prayer and practice mortification, but they do not rise to this detachment, and poverty, or self-denial, or spiritual pureness.... They render themselves spiritually enemies of the cross of Christ, for true spirituality seeks for bitterness rather than sweetness in God, inclines to suffering more than to consolation, and to be in want of everything for God rather than to possess; to dryness and afflictions rather than to sweet communications, knowing well that this is to follow Christ and deny self, while the other course is perhaps nothing but to seek oneself in God, which is the very opposite of love.... Would that I could persuade spiritual persons that the way of God consisteth not in the multiplicity of meditations, ways of devotion or sweetness, though these may be necessary for beginners, but in one necessary thing only, in knowing how to deny themselves in earnest; inwardly and outwardly, giving themselves up to suffer for Christ's sake, and annihilating themselves utterly. He who shall exercise himself herein, will then find all this and much more. And if he be deficient at all in this exercise, which is the sum and root of all virtue, all he may do will be but beating the air; utterly profitless, notwithstanding great meditations and communications.... And when he [the spiritual man] shall have been brought to nothing, when his humility is perfect, then will take place the union of the soul and God, which is the highest and noblest estate attainable in this life.

Now this state, which is perfection, manifestly requires great charity together with the perfect humility spoken of in this passage. St. John of the Cross also says: "The state of perfection... consists in the perfect love of God and contempt of self."⁴⁵¹

This doctrine, requiring great charity for perfection, is entirely conformable to what St. Thomas says of the seven degrees of humility. Following St. Anselm, he enumerates them as follows: (1) to acknowledge ourselves contemptible; (2) to grieve on account of this; (3) to admit that we are so; (4) to wish our neighbor to believe it; (5) patiently to endure its being said; (6) willingly to be treated as a person worthy of contempt; (7) to love to be treated in this fashion.⁴⁵² Such humility is truly perfection, or, as St. Thomas says, "the state of those who aim chiefly at union with and enjoyment of God: this belongs to the perfect who desire to be dissolved and to be with Christ,"⁴⁵³ and who do not recoil before hard things to be accomplished for the glory of God and the salvation of souls.⁴⁵⁴ Perfection thus conceived evidently requires great love of God.

Can a person attain to a lofty degree of habitual charity without great effort and generosity, by long years of daily Communion and of rather weak meritorious acts, so that, with this lofty charity, he would remain notably imperfect through lack of generosity in combating inordinate passions? Some theologians seem inclined to think so, notably Suarez in the passages we quoted at the beginning of this chapter. This opinion comes from the fact that, in the question *De augmento caritatis*, Suarez holds that imperfect (remissi) acts of charity at once obtain the increase of charity which they merit. He is led thereby even to admit that Holy Communion, though received with little devotion, still obtains a notable increase of charity, and that by absolution lost merits are restored in the same degree, even if the attrition of the penitent is barely sufficient.

On all these points, St. Thomas and the ancient theologians consider far more the disposition of fervor of will required in the subject that there may be a notable increase of grace. In their opinion, imperfect acts of charity do not immediately obtain the increase of charity that they merit, but only when there is a serious effort toward good.⁴⁵⁵ Likewise Holy Communion received with very little devotion obtains only a scant increase of charity, just as a person profits from the heat of a fireplace in proportion as he draws nearer to it instead of remaining at a distance.⁴⁵⁶ Lastly, according to St. Thomas, by absolution lost merits are restored in the same degree only if the penitent has a contrition commensurate with his sin and with the graces lost.⁴⁵⁷

From what we have said, we conclude that without great effort a person cannot reach a high degree of charity by years of daily Communion and weakly meritorious acts. By such practices he can succeed in remaining in the state of grace or in rising rapidly after having sinned mortally, but certainly he cannot reach a lofty charity in this way.

DOES PERFECTION REQUIRE THE HEROIC PRACTICE OF THE VIRTUES?

If patriotism requires heroism when one's country is in danger, certainly Christian perfection requires the heroic practice of the virtues, at least in *praeparatione animi*, in this sense, that the Christian must be ready, with the help of God, to endure even martyrdom if it is a question of choosing between the denial of his faith and torture. This is necessary even for salvation,⁴⁵⁸ and with still greater reason is required for perfection. In other words, a Christian who is faithful to his daily obligations should expect that in most difficult circumstances the Lord will give him help proportionate to the greatness of the duty. We read in the Gospel: "He that is faithful in that which is least, is faithful also in that which is greater."⁴⁵⁹ "Fear ye not them that kill the body and are not able to kill the soul"⁴⁶⁰ "Be not solicitous how or what you shall answer, or what you shall say. For the Holy Ghost shall teach you in the same hour what you must say."⁴⁶¹ "All that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution."⁴⁶² We must also love our enemies and come to their help if they are in grave need.

Moreover, St. Thomas⁴⁶³ teaches that the gifts of the Holy Ghost are necessary to salvation in order to prepare us to receive the special inspiration of the Holy Ghost with promptness and docility, especially when the acquired virtues and even the infused virtues do not suffice: that is, in the most difficult circumstances.

Since, according to these principles, every Christian must endure martyrdom rather than deny his faith or call it into question, what about the priest who has charge of souls? Even at the peril of his life he must bring the sacraments to those of the faithful entrusted to him when they are in grave necessity: for example, he must go and hear the confession of persons suffering from a

contagious disease. With even greater reason, a bishop is obliged, in certain circumstances, to give his life for his flock.

Nevertheless, to have heroism of the virtues *in praeparatione animi*, in the sense that we have just explained, does not mean that the soul possesses the virtues in the heroic degree. To prove heroic virtue, as Benedict XIV⁴⁶⁴ explains, four conditions are necessary: (1) the matter, object of the virtue, must be difficult, above the common strength of man; (2) the acts must be accomplished promptly, easily; (3) they must be accomplished joyously, with the joy of offering a sacrifice to the Lord; (4) they must be performed rather frequently, when the occasion presents itself.

Does Christian perfection require the heroic degree of the virtues? In the following chapter we shall see that St. John of the Cross teaches that Christian perfection requires the passive purifications of the senses and of the soul, which do away with the defects of beginners and those of proficient. ⁴⁶⁵ Now, in these purifications or interior trials, the soul must often heroically resist temptations against chastity and patience, then against faith, hope, and charity. From this point of view, it seems evident, therefore, that Christian perfection requires a ‘certain heroism of the virtues which can and ought, as time goes on, to continue to grow. This seems to be the opinion of St. Thomas, ⁴⁶⁶ when he describes the perfecting virtues and the perfect virtues; both are lofty and are not inferior to what Benedict XIV calls heroic virtues. ⁴⁶⁷

Lastly, it is certain that Christian charity, which is ordained to our configuration with the Savior crucified for us, ought for that very reason to tend to the heroic practice of the virtues. This may be deduced from what precedes: namely, since every Christian ought, in fact, to have the virtues in a heroic degree *in praeparatione animi* and to be ready, with the help of God, to endure even martyrdom rather than to deny his faith, this heroic act is not superior to that to which charity, or the love of God above all else, is ordained. By its very nature, this love prefers God to corporeal life and ought, therefore, to be disposed to the sacrifice of life, which is required in certain circumstances.

That Christian charity ought to tend to the heroic practice of the virtues appears also in the enumeration of the degrees of charity given by St. Bernard and explained by St. John of the Cross. ⁴⁶⁸ “Amor Dei tacit operari indesinenter et sustinere infatigabiliter.” This appears especially in the interior and exterior trials which the servants of God bear both for their personal purification and, following the example of the Savior, for their work for the salvation of souls.

The objection may be raised that, if this doctrine were true, many more Christians would reach heroism, for that to which charity is essentially ordained ought to be found in the majority. Heroism is rare. ⁴⁶⁹

The answer to this objection must be that it is also rare for a person to spend his whole life in the state of grace, without ever sinning mortally, from the moment that he receives baptism; yet sanctifying grace, by its very nature, is ordained to eternal life and therefore to last forever, without ever being destroyed by mortal sin. But we have received this very precious treasure in a fragile vessel, and sensuality or pride may make us lose it. Though the human soul is essentially rational and immortal, and grace ought to make it live an essentially divine life (which the state of grace normally demands), many souls live only a life of sensibility, only a few live a life of right reason. Likewise, charity, which is in every Christian, as it is the seed of eternal life, tends by its very nature to heroism and, if circumstances so require, to the sacrifice of the present life in order to remain faithful to God. What the love of country requires in certain circumstances, the love of God and of souls requires even more.

As far as great sanctity is concerned, it manifests itself especially by the connection or harmony of even the most dissimilar virtues. One man may be inclined by nature to fortitude, but not to meekness; for another, the inverse is true. Nature is, so to speak, determined ad unum; it needs to be completed by the different virtues under the direction of wisdom and prudence. Great sanctity is thus the eminent union of all the acquired and infused virtues, even of the most dissimilar ones, which God alone can so intimately unite. It is the union of great fortitude and perfect meekness, of ardent love of truth and justice and of great mercy toward souls that have gone astray. This union indicates a very close union with God, for what is divided in the kingdom of nature is united in the kingdom of God, especially in God Himself. Thus sanctity is a beautiful representation of the union of the most varied divine perfections, of infinite justice and infinite mercy in the eminence of the Deity or of the inner life of God. Christian martyrs manifest at one and the same time the greatest fortitude in their torments and the greatest meekness by praying for their executioners. ⁴⁷⁰ They are truly marked with the image of Jesus crucified.

Full Christian Perfection and the Passive Purifications

We have seen that Christian perfection consists especially in charity, which, more than any other virtue, unites us to God and to our neighbor in God. We must consider how perfection also requires the acts of the other virtues and of the seven gifts of the Holy Ghost.⁴⁷¹

ACTS OF THE OTHER VIRTUES REQUIRED FOR PERFECTION

Perfection also necessarily requires the acts of the other virtues which are of precept and which ought to be inspired, vivified, and rendered meritorious by charity.⁴⁷² Thus acts of faith, hope, religion, prayer, assistance at Mass, Holy Communion, are of the essence of perfection. Assuredly, Christian perfection requires also essentially the acts of prudence, justice, fortitude, patience, temperance, meekness, and humility, at least the acts of these virtues which are of precept. We shall see that the supreme precept of love demands that we should always grow as in charity.

The effective practice of the three evangelical counsels of poverty, chastity, and obedience belongs only accidentally to perfection, as a precious but not indispensable instrument.⁴⁷³ They are very useful means for the more certain and rapid attainment of perfection; but they are not indispensable means. A person may reach sanctity, as Blessed Anna Taigi did, in the married state and while retaining the right of ownership and the free use of the goods of this world. Yet a person must have the spirit of the counsels and not be attached to these earthly goods, but according to the expression of St. Paul, “use this world as if they used it not.”⁴⁷⁴ The three evangelical counsels invite us to renounce certain licit things, which, without being contrary to charity, more or less hinder its activity and its full development.⁴⁷⁵ If, therefore, the effective practice of these counsels is not necessary to perfection, one must at least have their spirit of detachment in order to become more and more closely united to God.

From what we have said of the spiritual organism of the virtues and the gifts, we see that the full perfection of Christian life requires all the infused virtues connected with charity and also the acquired moral virtues which give the extrinsic facility of producing supernatural acts by removing the obstacles. It also requires the seven gifts, which, as we have seen, are connected with charity⁴⁷⁶ and which consequently grow with it. Hence they are normally in a degree commensurate with that of this virtue.

We should, moreover, remember that normally the charity of the perfect ought to be greater and more intense than that of beginners and proficients, although accidentally a very generous beginner, called to become a great saint, may have a loftier charity than one of the perfect. From the natural point of view, there are in the same way little prodigies. The various ages of the spiritual life must be judged by what constitutes them as a rule, and not by an exceptional case. Normally greater vigor is required for adult age than for childhood; the same is true in the spiritual order.⁴⁷⁷

Thus we see that perfection is a plenitude which implies the exercise of all the virtues and also of the seven gifts of the Holy Ghost, which are in all the just. No one can be perfect without having, through the gift of understanding, a certain penetration of the mysteries of faith, and without having the gift of wisdom in a degree proportionate to charity, although this gift is found in some saints under a more clearly contemplative form and in others under a form more directed to action, to the apostolate, and to the works of mercy, as it was in St. Vincent de Paul who always saw in the poor the suffering members of our Lord.

Of this plenitude of the virtues and gifts, charity is the bond, to use the expression of St. Paul, “the bond of perfection.” This ensemble is like a well-bound sheaf that is offered to God. Moreover, we can truly say with St. Thomas that perfection consists especially in charity, and principally in the love of God, although it necessarily demands also the other virtues and the seven gifts. Thus, although the human body is of the essence of man, his essence is constituted especially by the rational soul, which distinguishes man from the animal.

Evidently the state of grace and the charity of beginners do not suffice to constitute perfection, properly so called, but only perfection in the broad sense, which excludes mortal sin. One must then grow in charity to reach the spiritual age of the perfect. To attain it we need abnegation, a great docility to the Holy Ghost through the exercise of the seven gifts, and the generous acceptance of the crosses or purifications which should destroy egoism and self-love and definitely assure the uncontested primacy of the love of God, of an ever more radiant charity.

THE PURIFICATIONS REQUIRED FOR THE FULL PERFECTION OF CHRISTIAN LIFE

At this point, we must emphasize the purifications required for the full perfection of Christian life and speak of them in a general manner, drawing our inspiration from what St. Paul tells us about them, and then from St. John of the Cross, a doctor of the Church who has most profoundly studied this question of the purifications of the soul. If the Church proposes his teaching to us as that of a master, it is especially that we may gather from this teaching what is of primary importance in it. We shall, moreover, find in it a great light by which to distinguish the three ages of the spiritual life: that of beginners, that of proficients, and that of the perfect.

We should not forget the loftiness of Christian perfection, considered in its normal plenitude or its integrity. St. Paul contemplated it when he wrote to the Philippians: "I count all things to be but loss for the excellent knowledge of Jesus Christ, my Lord; for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but as dung, that I may gain Christ... that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings; being made conformable to His death, if by any means I may attain to the resurrection which is from the dead. Not as though I had already attained, or were already perfect; but I follow after, if I may by any means apprehend, wherein I am also apprehended by Christ Jesus.... I do not count myself to have apprehended. But one thing I do: forgetting the things that are behind and stretching forth myself to those that are before, I press towards the mark, to the prize of the supernal vocation of God in Christ Jesus. Let us therefore, as many as are perfect, be thus minded.... Let us also continue in the same rule.... For many walk, of whom I have told you often,... that they are enemies of the cross of Christ,... who mind earthly things. But our conversation is in heaven.... So stand fast in the Lord, my dearly beloved."⁴⁷⁸

St. Paul presents here a perfection that is not merely Platonic or Aristotelian, but Christian in the full sense of the word. This perfection St. Paul proposes not only to himself as the apostle of Christ, but to the Philippians to whom he writes, and to all of us, to all who will be nourished by his epistles until the end of the world. Such perfection evidently requires a great purification of the soul and an unusual degree of docility to the Holy Ghost.

It has been said that St. Thomas Aquinas wrote little about the purifications of the soul. Such a statement disregards what he wrote in his commentaries on the Epistles of St. Paul and the Gospel of St. John, when, carried away by the word of God, he rises toward the summits of the spiritual life which the great mystics love to describe. One should read in particular what he wrote on the third chapter of the Epistle to the Philippians, which we have just quoted, about the desire to know Christ intimately and to be admitted to share in His sufferings, at least in order not to lose our crosses, in order to become conformable to Him, and to save souls with Him.⁴⁷⁹ One should also read what St. Thomas wrote on these words of Christ that are recorded by St. John: "I am the true vine; and My Father is the husbandman.... Every branch that beareth fruit, He will purge it, that it may bring forth more fruit."⁴⁸⁰ St. Thomas writes on this subject: "In order that the just who bear fruit, may bear still more, God frequently cuts away in them whatever is superfluous. He purifies them by sending them tribulations and permitting temptations in the midst of which they show themselves more generous and stronger. No one is so pure in this life that he no longer needs to be more and more purified."⁴⁸¹ These are the passive purifications of which St. John of the Cross spoke at great length.

We are concerned here with what is required to attain the summit of the normal development of charity. When we use the term "summit," we must not forget the word "normal"; and inversely, when we use the word "normal," we should not forget the word "summit." Frequently the term "normal" is applied to the state at which Christians as a rule actually arrive, and not sufficient attention is given to inquiring to what state they ought truly to reach if they were entirely faithful. Because the generality of Christian souls do not here on earth actually reach the stage of living in an almost continual union with God, we should not declare that this union is beyond the summit of the normal development of charity. We should not confound what ought to be or should be with what actually is: otherwise we would be led to declare that true virtue is not possible on earth, for, as a matter of fact, the majority of men pursue a useful or delectable good, such as money and earthly satisfactions, rather than virtuous good, the object of virtue.

In a society which is declining and returning to paganism, a number take as their rule of conduct, not duty, the obligatory good, which would demand too great effort in an environment where everything leads one to descend, but the lesser evil. They follow the current according to the law of the least effort. Not only do they tolerate this lesser evil, but they do it, and frequently they support it with their recommendations in order to keep their positions. They claim that they thus avoid a greater evil which others would do in their place if, ceasing to please, they should lose their situation or their command. And so saying, instead of helping others to reascend they assist them in descending, trying only to moderate the fall. How many statesmen and politicians have come to this pass! A somewhat similar condition exists in the spiritual life.

At this point we are seeking to learn what should be the full normal development of charity, and not the level which this virtue as a general rule actually reaches in good Christians. To achieve our end, we must remember that the fundamental law of the normal development of charity is quite different from that of our fallen nature. While our nature, in so far as it remains wounded even after baptism, inclines us to weaken and to descend, grace, which regenerates us progressively, ever leads us to ascend and should finally "spring forth into eternal life" according to the words of Christ.

There is in our lives a light and shade that is at times striking. St. Paul often speaks of it when he opposes the flesh to the spirit, the light of God to the shades of death which would like to recapture us: “Walk in the spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lusts of the flesh. For the flesh (which here stands for wounded nature) lusteth against the spirit: and the spirit against the flesh; for these are contrary one to another.”⁴⁸² “Spirit” in this case means the spirit of the new man enlightened and fortified by the Holy Ghost.⁴⁸³ Even in the baptized, concupiscence and many tendencies to sensuality, to vanity, and to pride remain. The love of God, which is in us, is still far from being victorious over all egoism, all self-love. A profound purification is then necessary; not only that which we must impose on ourselves, and which is called mortification, but that which God imposes when, according to Christ’s expression, He wishes to prune, to trim the branches of the vine, that they may bring forth more fruit.

St. John of the Cross has shown this admirably. At the beginning of the prologue of *The Ascent of Mount Carmel* he writes: “The dark night, through which the soul passes on its way to the divine light of the perfect union of the love of God, so far as it is possible in this life, requires for its explanation greater experience and light of knowledge than I possess. For so great are the trials, and so profound the darkness, spiritual as well as corporal, through which souls must pass if they will attain to perfection, that no human learning can explain them, nor experience describe them. He only who has passed through them can know them.” The branch which God trims or prunes is not only a living but a conscious branch. To know the nature of this pruning, which is similar to that of a tree, one must have experienced it. Each one must carry his cross, and only after having borne it with love does he know clearly what the cross is.

Not without suffering indeed, is complete victory obtained over egoism, sensuality, laziness, impatience, jealousy, envy, injustice in judgment, self-love, foolish pretensions, and also self-seeking in piety, the immoderate desire of consolations, intellectual and spiritual pride, all that is opposed to the spirit of faith and to confidence in God, that a man may succeed in loving the Lord perfectly, with his whole heart, with his whole soul, with all his strength, and with all his mind, and his neighbor (enemies included) as himself.⁴⁸⁴ Great firmness, patience, and longanimity are also needed to persevere in charity, whatever may happen, when the words of the Apostle are verified: “And all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.”⁴⁸⁵

We should not, therefore, be surprised that, when St. John of the Cross describes the road which leads most surely and most rapidly to the full perfection of Christian life, he declares that a soul could not reach it without undergoing the passive purification of the senses, which, in his opinion, marks the entrance into the illuminative way, and the passive purification of the spirit, which is at the threshold of the unitive way (if one understands the unitive way not in a diminished form, but according to its full normal development in the servants of God whom the Church proposes as models).

To show that the active purification which we impose on our selves does not suffice, St. John writes: “For, after all the efforts of the soul, it cannot by any exertion of its own actively purify itself so as to be in the slightest degree fit for the divine union of perfection in the love of God, if God Himself does not take it into His own hands, and purify it in the fire, dark to the soul, in the way I am going to explain.”⁴⁸⁶ This statement shows clearly the necessity of the cross, which is affirmed by the Gospel and by all Christian spirituality. We use here, and do so throughout this work, deliberately simple but entirely traditional terms, in order to avoid all exaggeration.

The same master says: “Souls begin to enter the dark (passive) night when God is drawing them out of the state of beginners, which is that of those who meditate on the spiritual road, and is leading them into that of proficients, the state of contemplatives, that, having passed through it, they may arrive at the state of the perfect, which is that of the divine union with God.”⁴⁸⁷

First of all, the soul is weaned from sensible consolations, which are useful for a time but become an obstacle when sought for themselves. Whence the necessity of the passive purification of the senses, which places the soul in sensible aridity and leads it to a spiritual life that is much more freed from the senses, the imagination, and reasoning. At this point the soul receives, through the gifts of the Holy Ghost, an intuitive knowledge which, despite a painful obscurity, initiates the soul profoundly into the things of God. At times this knowledge makes us penetrate them more deeply in an instant than would meditation over a period of months and years. To resist temptations against chastity or patience -temptations which present themselves rather frequently in this night of the senses there are required at times heroic acts of chastity and patience, which are, however, extremely fruitful.

In the night of the senses there is a striking light and shade. The sensible appetites are cast into obscurity and dryness by the disappearance of sensible graces on which the soul dwelt with an egoistical complacency. But in the midst of this obscurity, the higher faculties begin to be illumined by the light of life, which goes beyond reasoned meditation and leads to a loving and prolonged gaze upon God during prayer.

After treating of this purification, St. John of the Cross says: “The soul began to set out on the way of the spirit, the way of beginners and proficients, which is also called the illuminative way, or the way of infused contemplation.”⁴⁸⁸ This text is among the most important in all the writings of St. John of the Cross. Farther on we shall consider it again, and see its meaning

and import more clearly.

But even after this purification, that the soul may be freed from the defects of proficients, from the subtle pride which subsists in them, another purification, that of the spirit, is needed.⁴⁸⁹ This purification is found in far more advanced souls which ardently desire goodness, but which have too strong a desire that good be done by them or in their way. They must be purified from every human attachment to their judgment, to their excessively personal manner of seeing, willing, acting, from every human attachment to the good works to which they devote themselves. This purification, if well borne in the midst of temptations against the three theological virtues, will increase tenfold their faith, their confidence in God, and their love of God and neighbor.

This purifying trial presents itself under rather varied forms in the purely contemplative life and in that devoted to the apostolate. It differs also according as it is intended to lead the soul even here on earth to lofty perfection, or when it occurs only at the end of life to help souls to undergo, at least partially, their purgatory before death while meriting, while growing in love, instead of undergoing it after death without meriting. The dogma of purgatory thus confirms the necessity of these passive purifications of the senses and of the spirit.⁴⁹⁰

In this trial there is a light and shade superior to that of the night of the senses. The soul seems stripped of the lights and the facility to pray and to act in which it took satisfaction because of a remnant of self-love and pride. But a superior light appears in this night of the spirit; in the midst of temptations against faith and hope, appear little by little in all their relief the formal motives of the three theological virtues. They are like three stars of first magnitude: the first revealing truth, the helpful mercy, and the sovereign goodness of God. The soul comes to love God very purely with its whole heart; it becomes an adorer in spirit and in truth.

We shall, farther on, discuss this matter at greater length.⁴⁹¹ But what we have just said was necessary in order not to diminish the loftiness of the full normal development of Christian life. This summit, attainable here on earth, is, as we have seen, the one Christ Himself described at the beginning of His ministry in the evangelical beatitudes, expressed in the Sermon on the Mount. These beatitudes, especially the last one, go beyond the order of simple asceticism; they truly belong to the mystical order, like the passive purifications of which we have just spoken.⁴⁹²

FULL CHRISTIAN PERFECTION AND CONTEMPLATION

This affirmation of St. John of the Cross, that the full perfection of Christian life requires the passive purifications of the senses and the spirit, is fraught with consequences. From this assertion it follows that the infused contemplation of the mysteries of faith is in the normal way of sanctity, for, as St. John of the Cross⁴⁹³ shows, it begins with the passive purification of the senses, in the aridity of the sensible faculties. It is commonly said that the roots of knowledge are bitter and its fruits sweet. As much must be said of the roots and fruits of infused contemplation. It would be a gross error to confound this contemplation with consolations, which do not always accompany it.

No one any longer maintains that the infused contemplation of the mysteries of faith is a grace *gratis data*, like prophecy and the gift of tongues. In the judgment of all, contemplation is attached to the order of sanctifying grace or “the grace of the virtues and gifts,” and proceeds from faith illumined by the gifts of understanding and wisdom, from penetrating and savory faith.

Finally, if one cannot merit *de condigno* the actual efficacious grace of infused contemplation, it does not follow, as a result, that contemplation is not in the normal way of sanctity. Neither can the just man merit the grace of final perseverance (the state of grace at the moment of death, for this state is the very principle of merit); yet the grace of final perseverance is necessary to obtain eternal life. Likewise we cannot merit the efficacious grace which preserves us from mortal sin and keeps us in the state of grace.⁴⁹⁴ But these gifts, which the just man cannot merit, may be obtained by humble, trusting, and persevering prayer, for we read in Scripture: “Wherefore I wished, and understanding was given me: and I called upon God, and the spirit of wisdom came upon me.”⁴⁹⁵

It is clear from what we have already said that the infused contemplation of the mysteries of faith is morally necessary to full Christian perfection. Since, according to the Vatican Council (Denzinger, 1786), the revelation of the totality of the natural truths of religion is morally necessary that all these truths “may be easily known by all with firm certitude and without admixture of error,” likewise very few Christians would reach perfection without infused contemplation, which proceeds from faith enlightened by the gifts. What is more, they would reach only a diminished perfection, and not the full Christian perfection which Christ spoke of in the Sermon on the Mount while preaching the beatitudes. As St. Augustine and St. Thomas say, the beatitudes are, in fact, the highest acts of the Christian virtues perfected by the gifts.⁴⁹⁶ The teaching of St. John of the Cross, which we stated above, thus fully conforms to what is said of the beatitudes in the Gospel, and to the way St. Augustine and St. Thomas understood them.

The author of *The Imitation* likewise says: “There are found so few contemplative persons because there are few that know how to separate themselves entirely from perishable creatures.”⁴⁹⁷ Here too, as St. Teresa observes, “Many are called but few

are chosen.”⁴⁹⁸

Moreover, we must not confuse the question, “Is contemplation in the normal way of sanctity?” with the following: “Can all just souls actually attain to contemplation, no matter what their environment, their training, and direction?” Likewise, one should not confuse the question, “Is habitual grace essentially the germ of eternal life?” with this one: “Are all the baptized, at least the majority of them, saved?” or again with the following question: “Are the majority of those who have persevered for some years saved?”

Even if interior souls have good will, they may possibly not have all the generosity necessary to reach full perfection. The expression “full perfection” designates not only the essence but the integrity of perfection. That one may attain it, good training and direction are very useful, although God supplies these for very generous souls.

It should not be forgotten that the call to intimacy with God, like the call to Christian life, may be either general and remote, or individual and proximate. This last, in its turn, may be either sufficient or efficacious, and efficacious in regard either to the inferior degrees or to the highest degrees of union with God.

Lastly, in the works of authors such as St. Teresa and St. John of the Cross, distinction must be clearly made, as is customary, between what is a general principle or at least a main conclusion, and what is only an answer to an accidental difficulty. Otherwise, one would confuse what ought to be with what actually is ideal perfection, and what is still far from it.

The loftiness of the end to be attained must not be lessened, but should be considered as it was set forth for us by Christ when He preached the beatitudes. As far as the means are concerned, prudence ought to propose them with the moderation that considers the diverse conditions in which souls find themselves, and according as they are among the beginners or the proficients. By so doing, the loftiness of the end to be attained is safeguarded, and also the realism of a truly practical direction. The greatness of the end to be pursued should certainly never be lost sight of.

Perfection and the Precept of the Love of God

We have seen that Christian perfection consists principally in charity, and that Christ describes it for us in all its loftiness in the eight beatitudes. We must now ask whether Christian perfection thus conceived is only counseled for all Christians, or whether the supreme precept makes it their duty to strive for it. This is equivalent to asking the exact meaning and import of the double precept of the love of God and of neighbor.

IS THE FIRST PRECEPT WITHOUT LIMIT?

Some have thought that for even the perfect observance of the supreme precept of the love of God and of neighbor, a high degree of charity is not necessary. From this point of view the precept would not be directed toward perfection; rather perfection would go beyond the precept and would consist in the accomplishment of certain counsels of charity, which would be superior to the first precept itself.⁴⁹⁹ Were this so, the supreme precept would have a limit.

This may seem true if we consider the matter superficially. In stating this problem, St. Thomas carefully notes this likelihood, remarking by way of difficulty or objection: "If, therefore, the perfection of the Christian life consists in observing the commandments, it follows that perfection is necessary for salvation, and that all are bound thereto; and this is evidently false."⁵⁰⁰ St. Thomas answers this objection in a manner that is both simple and profound, by declaring that all are obliged in a general way to tend to perfection, each according to his condition, without being obliged to be already perfect. It is surprising to find that modern theologians, and not the least among them, failing to comprehend the doctrine of the greatest masters on this fundamental point of spirituality, have turned this objection into their very thesis.

St. Thomas shows plainly that the supreme precept obliges all in a general way to tend toward the perfection of charity, at least according to the common way, although the vows of religious oblige only those who have made them to tend to this perfection according to the special way of their vocation.

The holy doctor offers the following explanation: "It is written (Deut. 6: 5): 'Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart,' and (Lev. 19: 18): 'Thou shalt love thy neighbor (Vulg., friend) as thyself'; and these are the commandments of which our Lord said (Matt. 22: 40): 'On these two commandments dependeth the whole law and the prophets.' Now, the perfection of charity, according to which the Christian life is said to be perfect, consists precisely in loving God with our whole heart, and our neighbor as ourselves. Therefore it seems that perfection consists in the observance of the precepts (and not precisely in the fulfillment of the counsels of poverty, chastity, and obedience).

"Perfection is said to consist in a thing in two ways: in one way, primarily and essentially, in another, secondarily and accidentally. Primarily and essentially the perfection of the Christian life consists in charity; primarily in the love of God, and secondarily in the love of our neighbor. This charity is the object of the two chief precepts of the divine law. Now, the love of God and of our neighbor is not commanded according to a measure, so that what is in excess of the measure be a matter of counsel. This is evident from the very form of the commandment, pointing, as it does, to perfection, for instance in the words, 'Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart (where is the limit?): since the *whole* is the same as the *perfect*, according to the Philosopher (Phys. III, text. 64), and in the words, 'Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself,' since everyone loves himself most (*maxime*).⁵⁰¹ The reason for this is that the 'end of the commandment is charity' according to the Apostle (cf. I Tim. 1:5). Now, the end does not present itself to the will in a fragmentary manner, but in its totality. In this it differs from the means. Either a person wills the end, or he does not will it; he does not will it by halves, as the Philosopher observes (Polit., 1:6). Thus a physician does not measure the amount of his healing, but how much medicine or diet he shall employ for the purpose of healing. Consequently it is evident that perfection consists essentially in the observance of the commandments; wherefore Augustine says (*De perf. justit.*, VIII): 'Why, then, should not this perfection be prescribed to man, although no man has it in this life?.'⁵⁰²

"Secondarily and instrumentally, however, perfection consists in the observance of the counsels; in other words, they are only precious instruments to attain it. In fact, all the counsels, like the commandments, are ordained to charity, with one difference, however; the commandments, other than the two great precepts of love, are intended to remove whatever is contrary to charity, whatever might destroy it; while the end of the counsels is to remove whatever hinders or prevents the perfect exercise of charity without, however, being opposed to it, as for example, marriage, the necessity of being occupied with secular affairs, and things of this sort. This is what Augustine teaches (*Enchir.*, chap. 21): 'Precepts... and counsels... are well

observed when one fulfills them in order to love God and one's neighbor for God in this world and in the next."⁵⁰³

St. Thomas adds that this is why the abbot Moses says (Conferences of the Fathers, Bk. I, chap. 7): "Fasts, vigils, meditation on Holy Scripture, penury, and the loss of all one's wealth are not perfection but means to perfection, since not in them does perfection consist, but by them one attains it"⁵⁰⁴ more rapidly and more surely.⁵⁰⁵ A man can be voluntarily poor for other than a religious motive, through philosophical scorn of wealth, for example; likewise one, can be poor for love of God, as St. Francis was, but this is not indispensable to perfection. Thus a soul may reach sanctity in the married state without the effective practice of the counsels, but on condition that it have the spirit of the counsels, which is the spirit of detachment from worldly goods for love of God.

All this shows that perfection lies principally in the more and more generous fulfillment of the supreme precept, which has 'no limit. No one can find a limit in the statement in Deuteronomy: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart and with thy whole soul and with thy whole strength,"⁵⁰⁶ and not by halves. In other words, all Christians to whom this precept is addressed, must, unless they already have the perfection of charity, at least tend toward it, each according to his condition, whether it be in the married state or in the sacerdotal life or in the religious state. For all, it is not only better to tend toward this perfection of charity, it is a duty identical with that of continually advancing toward heaven where the love of God will reign fully, a love which nothing will any longer be able to destroy or render tepid.

THE LOVE OF GOD DOES NOT CONSIST IN A GOLDEN MEAN

As this heading declares, the doctrine, that the supreme precept has no limit, is greatly confirmed if we consider that the end in question here is not an intermediary end, such as health, but the last end, God Himself, who is infinite good. If a sick person desires health without limitations, with greater reason we should desire the love of God, without limiting our desire to a certain degree. We do not know the degree to which God wishes to lead us and will lead us if we are faithful and generous. St. Thomas says: "Never can we love God as much as He ought to be loved, or believe and hope in Him as much as we should."⁵⁰⁷ In contrast to the moral virtues, the theological virtues do not consist essentially in a happy mean: their object, their formal motive, their essential measure is God Himself, His infinite truth and goodness.

We are far from the *aurea mediocritas* of which Horace spoke. As an Epicurean, he even seriously reduced the golden mean of the moral virtues. The truly golden mean of these virtues is not only that of selfish calculation, which, without love of virtue, avoids the disadvantages of vices that are opposed to each other; the truly golden mean is already a summit, that of right reason and of virtuous good loved for itself, over and above the useful and the delectable. But this summit has not an infinite elevation; it is the reasonable rule determining the measure of our acts in the use of exterior goods and in our relations with our fellow men. For example, in the presence of certain dangers we must be courageous and even not fear death if our country is in danger; but to expose ourselves to death without a just motive would not be courage but temerity. Moreover, there are some sacrifices that our country cannot rightly require of us. Our country is not God, and consequently cannot demand that we love it above all else, sacrificing to it our Christian faith, the practice of the true religion, and our eternal salvation. Such a course of action would be an excessive love of country.

But, over and above the moral virtues, the theological virtues, which have God immediately as their object and motive, cannot essentially consist in a golden mean. We cannot love God too much, believe too greatly in Him, hope too much in Him; we can never love Him as much as He should be loved. Thus we see more clearly that the supreme precept has no limit. It asks us all ever to strive here on earth for a purer and stronger love of God.

If hope is the mean between despair and presumption, this is not because the presumptuous man hopes too greatly in God, but because he displaces the motive of hope by hoping for what God could not promise, such as pardon without true repentance. Likewise, credulity does not consist in believing too greatly in God, but in believing what is only human invention or imagination as if it were revealed by Him.⁵⁰⁸

We cannot believe too strongly in God, or hope too greatly in Him, or love Him too much. To forget, as the Epicureans do, that the rational, golden mean is already a summit, and to wish to make the theological virtues consist essentially in a golden mean as the moral virtues do, is characteristic of mediocrity or tepidity, erected into a system under pretext of moderation. Mediocrity is a mean between good and evil and, indeed, nearer evil than good. The reasonable, golden mean is already a summit, that is, moral good; the object of the theological virtues is infinite truth and goodness. This truth has at times been brought into relief by the comparison between the mediocre man and the true Christian.⁵⁰⁹

THE DUTY OF ADVANCING ON THE WAY TO ETERNITY

Finally, another reason why the precept of love has no limit is found in the fact that we are travelers on the way to eternity, and that we advance by growing in the love of God and of our neighbor. Consequently our charity ought always to grow even to the end of our journey. Not only is this a counsel, that is, something better, but an obligation. Moreover, a soul here on earth not

desirous of growing in charity would offend God. The road to eternity is not made to be used as a place for rest or sleep, but rather to be traveled. For the traveler who has not yet reached the obligatory end or term of his pilgrimage, progress is commanded and not only counseled, just as a child must grow, according to the law of nature, under pain of becoming a dwarf, a deformed being.⁵¹⁰ Now, when it is a question of advancing toward God, it is not by the movement of our bodies that we advance, but rather spiritually, by the steps of love, as St. Gregory the Great says, by growth in charity which ought to become a purer and stronger love. This is what we ought especially to ask in prayer; this is the import of the first petitions of the Our Father.

Does it follow that a person who does not yet fulfill the precept perfectly, transgresses it? Not at all; for, as St. Thomas says, “To avoid this transgression, it is enough to fulfill the law of charity to a certain extent as beginners do.

“The perfection of divine love falls entirely (universaliter) within the object of the precept; even the perfection of heaven is not excluded from it, since it is the end toward which one must tend, as Augustine says (*De perfectione justitiae*, chap. 8; *De Spiritu et littera*, chap. 36). But a person avoids the transgression of the precept by putting into practice a little love of God.

“Now, the lowest degree of the love of God consists in loving nothing more than God or contrary to God or equal with God, and he who has not this degree of perfection in no wise fulfills the commandment. There is another degree of charity which cannot be realized in this life and which consists in loving God with all our strength, in such a way that our love always tends actually toward Him. This perfection is possible only in heaven, and therefore the fact that a person does not yet possess it, entails no transgression of the commandment. And, in like manner, the fact that a person has not attained the intermediate degrees of perfection, entails no transgression, provided only that he reaches the lowest degree.”⁵¹¹

But evidently he who remains in this lowest degree does not fulfill the supreme commandment in all its perfection: “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart and with thy whole soul and with all thy strength and with all thy mind.”

It would be an error to think that only imperfect charity is of precept, and that only the degrees of this virtue superior to the lowest degree are of counsel. They fall under the precept, if not as something to be realized immediately, at least as that toward which we must tend.⁵¹² Thus, by virtue of the law of his development, a child must grow in order to become a man, otherwise he would not remain a child, but would become a deformed dwarf. The same is true in the spiritual life.⁵¹³ The law of growth has serious demands. If the divine seed, placed in us by baptism, does not develop, it runs the risk of dying, of being choked out by weeds, as we read in the parable of the sower. In the spiritual life these abnormal souls are certainly not the true mystics, but the retarded and the lukewarm.

Perfection is an end toward which all must tend, each according to his condition. This capital point of spiritual doctrine, forgotten by some modern theologians, was highlighted in 1923 by Pius XI in his encyclical *Studiorum ducem*, in which he presents St. Thomas to us as the undisputed master not only of dogmatic and moral theology, but also of ascetical and mystical theology. Pius XI draws particular attention to the doctrine of the Angelic Doctor, namely, that the perfection of charity falls under the supreme precept as the end toward which every Christian must tend according to his condition in life.⁵¹⁴

That same year Pius XI, in another encyclical, recalled the fact that St. Francis de Sales taught the same doctrine.

Three consequences, which we shall develop farther on, result from this doctrine: (1) In the way of salvation, he who does not advance, goes back. Why is this so? Because it is a law that one must always advance, under penalty of becoming a retarded soul, just as a child who does not develop as he should, becomes abnormal. (2) The progress of charity should indeed be more rapid in proportion as we approach nearer to God, who draws us more strongly. Thus the movement of a falling stone is so much the more rapid as the stone approaches the earth which attracts it. (3) Lastly, since such is the loftiness of the first precept, assuredly actual graces are progressively offered to us proportionate to the end to be attained, for God does not command the impossible. He loves us more than we think. In return, we must give Him our love.

When we have succeeded in loving Him with all our heart, even with an affective love, we must love Him with all our soul, with an effective love, with all our strength, when the hour of trial strikes for us, and finally, with all our mind, progressively freed from the fluctuations of the sensible faculties, that, henceforth spiritualized, we may become truly “adorers in spirit and in truth.”

All this doctrine shows that sanctification must not be too greatly separated from salvation, as is done by those who say: “I shall never become a saint; it is enough for me to be saved.” This statement contains an error of perspective. Progressive sanctification is, in reality, the way of salvation. In heaven there will be only saints, and, in this sense of the word, each of us must strive for sanctity.

Perfection and the Evangelical Counsels

We have seen that in virtue of the supreme precept all the faithful must tend to the perfection of charity, each according to his condition or state in life. In addition, we have seen that no one can reach Christian perfection without having the spirit of the evangelical counsels, which is the spirit of detachment spoken of by St. Paul when he says that we should use the goods of this world as though not using them: in other words, without fixing our affections on them, without settling ourselves on this earth as if we were going to live here forever. We must not forget that we are all travelers on the road to eternity, and that we must all grow in charity until we reach the end of our journey. This is a general obligation springing from the first precept. Moreover, by reason of a particular vocation, certain souls have a special obligation to tend toward perfection according to a particular kind of life. This is the case with the priest, that he may be the worthy minister of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is also the case with religious who are not priests, because of their vows or promises not only to live according to the spirit of the counsels, but effectively to practice the counsels of poverty, absolute chastity, and obedience. We shall now discuss the effective practice of these three counsels in relation to Christian perfection and to the healing of our moral wounds.

THE THREE EVANGELICAL COUNSELS AND THE WOUNDS OF THE SOUL

Christ said to the rich young man mentioned in St. Matthew's Gospel: "If thou wilt be perfect, go sell what thou hast and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven. And come, follow Me."⁵¹⁵ The Evangelist adds: "When the young man had heard this word, he went away sad, for he had great possessions."

The effective practice of the three evangelical counsels is not obligatory nor is it indispensable to reach the perfection toward which we must all tend, but it is a most suitable means more surely and rapidly to reach the end and not run the danger of stopping halfway. We have said that a soul cannot reach perfection without having the spirit of the counsels, or the spirit of detachment. Now, it is difficult truly to have this spirit without the effective practice of this detachment, which seemed too hard to the rich young man. Sanctity can be attained in the married state, as we see from the lives of St. Clotilde, St. Louis, and Blessed Anna Maria Taigi, but it is more difficult and more rare to reach it by this common road. It is not easy to have the spirit of detachment in regard to worldly goods, permitted pleasures, and our own will, if, in reality, we do not effectively detach ourselves from them. The Christian who lives in the world is often exposed to excessive absorption and preoccupation about a situation to be acquired or maintained for himself and his family. He is also in danger of forgetting to some extent that he must advance toward another life, another fatherland, and that to reach it, something is needed quite different from the understanding of worldly affairs: in other words, the help of God, which should be sought through prayer, and the fruit of grace, which is merit. In family life he is also inclined to dwell on affections in which he finds a legitimate satisfaction for his need of loving. He is also led to forget that he must above all things love God with his whole heart, with his whole soul, with all his strength, and with his whole mind. Frequently charity is not in him a living flame which rises toward God while vivifying all other affections; instead, it is like a burning coal which slowly dies out under the ashes. This explains the ease with which a number of these Christians sin, scarcely reflecting that their sin is an infidelity to the divine friendship, which should be the most profound sentiment in their hearts.

Lastly, the Christian living in the world is often exposed to doing his own will, side by side, so to speak, with the will of God. After giving a few moments to prayer on Sundays and weekdays, he may organize his life from the simple, natural point of view in accordance with his reason which is more or less deformed by self-love and the prejudices or conventions of his environment. Then faith seems at times reduced to a number of sacred truths that have been memorized, but have not become truths of life. The understanding is then too much preoccupied with earthly interests, sometimes with diversions; should difficulties demanding great moral energy arise, the spirit of faith is often found wanting. The great truths about the future life, about the helps that come to us from Christ, remain practically inefficacious, like distant truths that have never been assimilated and are lost in the depths of the heavens. Practical faith is lacking then, a faith that would cause the light of the mysteries of salvation to descend into the midst of the difficulties of daily life.

Such are evidently the dangers which the Christian encounters when he does not seek to practice effectively the evangelical counsels in the measure possible to him. If he fails in this matter, he will go astray and fall progressively into three moral maladies radically opposed to the three counsels. St. John speaks of these evils when he says: "For all that is in the world (or according to its spirit) is the concupiscence of the flesh and the concupiscence of the eyes and the pride of life, which is not of

the Father, but is of the world.”⁵¹⁶ They are three purulent wounds which ravage souls and bring death to them by turning them away from God.

These three moral wounds appeared in the world after the sin of the first man and our repeated personal sins. To understand their gravity, we should recall the fact that they replace in many souls the triple harmony that existed in the state of original justice. It is this triple harmony that Christ wishes precisely to re-establish by the three evangelical counsels. Originally, on the first day of creation there was perfect harmony between God and the soul, between the soul and the body, between the body of man and exterior goods. Harmony existed between God and the soul, since it is created to know God, to love Him, to serve Him, and by this means to obtain eternal life.

The first man, who was created in “the state of sanctity and original justice,” was a contemplative who conversed familiarly with God, as we read in the first chapters of Genesis. His soul found its principal nourishment in divine things, “a little less than the angels.”⁵¹⁷ In the light of God, he considered all things, and he obeyed the Lord.

From this superior harmony came that which existed between the soul and the body, which was made to serve the soul. Since the soul was perfectly subordinated to God, it had dominion over its body. The passions or movements of the sensible appetites followed with docility the direction of right reason enlightened by faith and the impelling force of the will vivified by charity.

Finally, there was harmony between the body and exterior goods. The earth produced its fruits spontaneously without the necessity of being worked painfully; the animals were docile, or at least did no harm to man, who had received dominion over them.

Sin disturbed this triple harmony by destroying the highest of the three; it introduced the triple disorder, called by St. John “the concupiscence of the flesh, and the concupiscence of the eyes, and the pride of life.”

Man revolted against the law of God; and the human soul, thenceforth inclined to pride, has often repeated: “I will not serve.” The soul has ceased to nourish itself with divine truth, and instead conceives its own narrow, false, ever-changing, little ideas. It wished to make for itself its own truths and principles, and to direct itself alone, limiting as far as possible the authority of God, instead of receiving from Him the salutary direction which alone leads to true life. Refusing to submit to the dominion of God, the soul has lost control over its body and its passions, which were made to obey the reason and will. What is more, the soul has often made itself the slave of the body, of its lower instincts: this is the concupiscence of the flesh. Many people so far forget their divine destiny as to be occupied from morning to night with their bodies, which become their idols. Their passions reign as masters; the soul becomes their slave, for passions that are antithetic, love, jealousy, anger, hatred, follow each other in the soul in spite of it. Instead of directing these passions, the soul is carried away by them as by wild horses which no longer know the bit.

Finally, the body, instead of making use of exterior goods, becomes their slave; it overtaxes itself at times to obtain an abundance of these exterior goods. It surrounds itself with useless luxury, to the detriment of the poor who are hungry. It must have all that glitters and makes a man seem important: this is the concupiscence of the eyes. After accumulating a fortune, many men are wholly absorbed in the care of maintaining and increasing it. Slaves to their business, they never find time to pray, to read a page of the Gospel, to feed their souls. They settle down here on earth as if they were going to stay here always, with hardly any concern for their salvation.

This triple slavery, which replaces the original triple harmony, is order overthrown. Christ came to restore the order that had been destroyed; with this end in view, He gave us the three evangelical counsels.

THE THREE EVANGELICAL COUNSELS AND THE RESTORATION OF ORIGINAL HARMONY⁵¹⁸

Divine Providence sent our Lord to restore the primitive order. This restoration appeared first in the very person of Jesus, and should continue in the Church, which ought to shine with the splendor of the mark of sanctity. In His humanity Jesus was the model of all the virtues, the eminent exemplar of all sanctity. His humanity was consecrated to God in the first instant of His conception by substantial union with the Word, and thus received an innate, substantial, uncreated sanctity. It is impossible to think of a more intimate, more indissoluble union with God than the personal, hypostatic union of the human nature and the divine nature in the person of the Word made flesh. As a result, the humanity of the Savior is consecrated to God in all its faculties and acts, to such an extent that His intellect is infallible and can see things only in the divine light, to such a degree that His will is absolutely impeccable, and that His most pure sensibility cannot know any disorder. All the acts of the holy soul of Christ are of God, come from God, go to God; nowhere is the sovereign domain of the Most High exercised with so absolute a plenitude.

Because the humanity of Christ is thus radically consecrated to God, it is separated from the spirit of the world and is given to the world to save it and deliver it from its spirit of blindness, concupiscence, and pride. Christ’s very elevation separates Him from the spirit of the world, from all that is evil or less good. By this innate elevation, Christ is detached from worldly

goods, honors, and mundane affairs; the model of poverty, He had not “whereon to rest His head.” By the elevation of His spirit, Christ is also detached from the pleasures of the world, free from the demands of a family, that He may found a universal family, the Church. In this He is the model of religious chastity, which is the condition of His universal, spiritual paternity. Finally, by His supernatural elevation, Christ is detached from all self-will. At the age of twelve He declares that He must be about His Father’s business, and He is “obedient unto death, even to the death of the cross.”

Because the Savior comes from above, His very elevation separates Him from all that is inferior. It separates Him thus, not that He may be isolated but that He may act on the world from a great height, and that His action may be more universal and more profound. It is like that of the sun when it reaches its zenith. Because Jesus was free from all the bonds which attach man to his individual goods, to his family, to his petty personal ideas, He could act, not only on the men of one country or one period, but on the entire human race to which He brings eternal life. The Gospel has not grown old; it is of the present time, belonging to the very actuality of God. It is a sign that Jesus was not of the world, but was given to the world to save it.

We see thus in our Lord the restoration of the original harmony, a restoration so splendid indeed that it considerably surpasses the perfection of the first man. There “where sin abounded, grace did more abound.” This restoration of the primitive order should continue in the Church, which should shine with the splendor of the mark of sanctity. Christ willed that His Church should be one, holy, catholic, and apostolic. Its sanctity must be striking and manifest, not only at great intervals in certain heroic souls like the martyrs and the great canonized saints, but in a permanent manner in religious institutions and families, where a great number of souls go for training in sanctity, and make profession to imitate Christ, His spirit of detachment from the things of the world and of union with God. Nevertheless, no matter how generous these souls are, there is a great difference between them and our Lord. He came from above, and was separated from the spirit of the world by His very elevation; they come from below, from the region of sin and falsehood. They must gradually detach themselves from it in order to consecrate themselves ever more intimately to God.

To souls which have received this special vocation, Christ proposes not only that they live according to the spirit of the three evangelical counsels, but that they practice them effectively, and He promises them the hundredfold in return. He invites them to a triple separation in view of a triple consecration which will more and more assure in them the growth of the highest virtues: of faith, hope, and charity; in other words, of union with God.

In the use of worldly goods, He counsels restraint that they may not be led into excess. He invites them to practice poverty, to separate themselves from the free use and even from the possession of exterior goods, and to consecrate these goods to God that they may no longer be an obstacle, but a means in the journey towards eternity. He invites them to absolute chastity, that is, to renounce completely the pleasures of the senses, and to consecrate their bodies and hearts to God that these may no longer be an obstacle, but a means vivified by grace. He invites them, finally, to holy obedience, to free themselves from all self-will, so easily capricious and rebellious, in order that their wills may no longer be an obstacle but a means more and more supernaturalized by charity, with a view to union with God which will daily grow closer and stronger.

The practice of these three virtues and of the corresponding vows is not exempt from difficulties, but it suppresses many others. The bird bears its wings, but still more the wings support the bird. In like manner, the religious virtues and the three vows impose special obligations, it is true; but, above all, they bear souls toward the perfection of charity over a more rapid and a more sure road.

The three virtues of poverty, chastity, and obedience are called religious or holy virtues because they are subordinated to the virtue of religion, which renders to God the worship that is due Him. By reason of its object, the worship due to the Lord, the virtue of religion is the first of the moral virtues; it takes its place immediately after the three theological virtues and infused prudence which directs it. It offers to God the acts of the three religious virtues of poverty, chastity, and obedience. To make certain of not turning back, the religious binds himself by the three corresponding vows, a triple engagement or promise to practice these three virtues, first for a time, then until death, following the example of Christ, who was obedient “unto death, even to the death of the cross.” As the Savior offered Himself, the religious offers himself also in union with Him, giving his entire life as an oblation or sacrifice. Since the religious ought to offer everything,—exterior goods, body, heart, will, personal judgment—this sacrifice, if well made and not revoked as time goes on, truly deserves the title of holocaust. It ought to be lived daily in an ever more intimate manner; then it obtains the hundredfold promised by the Savior, who declared: “Amen, I say to you, there is no man who hath left house or brethren or sisters or father or mother or children or lands for My sake and for the gospel, who shall not receive a hundred times as much, now in this time, houses and brethren and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions; and in the world to come, life everlasting.”⁵¹⁹

We shall see farther on that faith is the soul of holy obedience and that the practice of this virtue makes the spirit of faith grow. We shall likewise see that hope or trust in God is the soul of holy poverty, which obliges us to rely on the help of God, and that charity is the soul of holy chastity, which, when practiced in all its delicacy, makes the love of God and of souls in God flourish in us.

The Special Obligation of the Priest and the Religious to Tend to Perfection

Since we have spoken of the general obligation by which every Christian, according to his condition, must tend to perfection in virtue of the supreme precept of the love of God, it seems fitting to treat briefly the special obligation which exists on this point for the religious and for every priest, whether he has made the vows of religion or not. We must show here especially how the virtue of religion ought ever to be increasingly under the influence of the virtue of charity, of a stronger and purer love of God.

THE NATURE OF THIS SPECIAL OBLIGATION FOR RELIGIOUS

This obligation is based on religious profession; the grace of religious profession is not transitory but permanent if the religious is faithful. As St. Thomas says: “Properly speaking, one is said to be in the state of perfection, not through making an act of perfect love, but because he binds himself permanently and with a certain solemnity to what leads to perfection.”⁵²⁰ “Both these conditions are competent to religious and bishops. For religious bind themselves by vow to refrain from worldly affairs, which they might lawfully use, in order more freely to give themselves to God.... In like manner, bishops bind themselves to things pertaining to perfection, when they take up the pastoral duty, to which it belongs that a shepherd ‘lay down his life for his sheep.’”⁵²¹

Strictly speaking, the religious thus makes “profession to tend toward perfection.” “Not as though I had already attained,” says St. Paul, “or were already perfect; but I follow after, if I may by any means apprehend, wherein I am also apprehended by Christ Jesus.”⁵²² As a result, the religious does not commit a sin of hypocrisy because he is not perfect, but he would commit it if he did not tend more sincerely to perfection. In his case, this special obligation is identified with that of observing his three vows and his rule.⁵²³ But this obligation must always be considered in its relation to the general obligation based on the great precept of the love of God and one’s neighbor. When this is done, the religious life keeps all its loftiness and appears not only under its canonical or juridical aspect, but with its great spiritual meaning.

From this point of view, we see the true import of this principle, which must not be understood in a material and mechanical fashion by multiplying the vows without reason: “It is better and more meritorious to do one and the same deed with a vow than without.”⁵²⁴ It does not follow from this statement that vows should always be multiplied in order to have greater merit; but the religious ought to observe his three vows better and better by more profoundly penetrating the three following reasons given by St. Thomas in the section where he explains this principle:

- 1) The vow is an act of the virtue of religion or of *latría* which is superior to the virtues of obedience, chastity, and poverty; the acts of these virtues it offers as worship to God.
- 2) By a perpetual vow, especially if it is solemn, man offers to God not only an isolated act, but the faculty itself. It is better to give the tree with its fruits than to offer the fruits alone.
- 3) By the vow, the will fixes itself firmly and irrevocably in the good. It is more meritorious to act thus, just as, on the other hand, it is more grave to sin by a will that is obstinate in evil.

When a person lives according to this spirit, he grasps more and more concretely and vividly what theology teaches: namely, that by the three vows, which belong to the very essence of the religious state, the religious, as St. Thomas shows,⁵²⁵ separates himself from what would hinder his affections from being wholly directed toward God. If he does not take back his offering, he offers himself totally to the Lord as a holocaust. His state is thus a state of separation from the world, especially from the spirit of the world, and a state of consecration to God.

Three things especially may hinder his affection from being completely directed toward God: the concupiscence of the eyes or the desire of exterior things, the concupiscence of the flesh, and the pride of life, the love of independence. These he renounces by his three vows; then he offers to God exterior goods through poverty, his body and his heart through religious chastity, his will through obedience. He has nothing more that he can offer and, if in reality he does not take back what he has given, but practices ever more perfectly, with a greater love of God and of his neighbor, the three virtues corresponding to the three vows, he truly offers to God a perfect sacrifice meriting the name of holocaust. His life is thus, with the Divine Office, the daily accompaniment of the Sacrifice of the Mass. His life is an act of worship, and even an act of *latría* offered to God, by the virtue of religion. This is true especially if the religious, far from taking back his gift once he has bestowed it, often renews his promises with greater merit than when he made them for the first time. In fact, merit grows in him with charity and the other virtues, and thereby his consecration to God becomes increasingly intimate and complete.

What is the end of this triple renunciation and triple oblation or consecration? St. Thomas⁵²⁶ answers that it is union with God, which ought daily to become more intimate, and, as it were, the prelude of eternal life. The religious ought to reach it by the imitation of Christ, who is “the way, the truth, and the life.” Christ, as man, was completely separated from the spirit of the world, and as united to God as is possible. By the grace of personal union with the Word, His nature was wholly consecrated, His intellect rendered infallible, His will impeccable; in Him all thoughts, every act of the will, and all the emotions of His sensibility were from God and were directed to God. The sovereign dominion of God has never been as completely exercised as in the sacred humanity of the Savior.

Now, the religious makes profession to follow Him; but, whereas Christ came from above, the religious comes from below, from the region of sin, and he must separate himself progressively from all that is inferior in order to consecrate himself more and more intimately to God. Then will be realized in him the exhortation of St. Paul: “Seek the things that are above, where Christ is sitting at the right hand of God. Mind the things that are above, not the things that are upon the earth. For you are dead; and your life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ shall appear, who is your life, then you also shall appear with Him in glory.”⁵²⁷ In his commentary on this epistle, St. Thomas says: “Do not taste the things of the world, for you are dead to the world; your life is hidden with Christ. He is hidden as far as we are concerned because He is in the glory of God His Father, and likewise the life which comes to us from Him is hidden, according to these words of Scripture: ‘O how great is the multitude of Thy sweetness, O Lord, which Thou hast hidden for them that fear Thee, which Thou hast wrought for them that hope in Thee’ (Ps. 30:20). ‘To him that overcometh, I will give the hidden manna, and will give him... a new name written, which no man knoweth but he that receiveth it’” (Apoc. 2: 17).

This spiritual manna, remotely symbolized by the manna of the desert, is the food of the soul; it is infused contemplation, which proceeds from living faith illumined by the gifts of the Holy Ghost. Thus, says St. Thomas, the active life (or the exercise of the moral virtues) disposes to the contemplative life of union with God,⁵²⁸ and especially, “virginity is directed to the good of the soul in respect of the contemplative life.”⁵²⁹ As a result, every religious life tends to the more and more perfect fulfillment of the precept of divine love and to very close union with God.

Therefore it is advisable always to consider the special obligation of the religious to tend to perfection in its relation to the general obligation which is based on the supreme precept of love. The latter rises far above the three evangelical counsels, since they are only means or instruments to reach more rapidly and surely the perfection of charity or close union with God, which radiates on one’s neighbor in a way that is increasingly fruitful.⁵³⁰

Thus, under the inspiration of the three theological virtues, the three religious virtues find full exercise. A very close bond is established between them; so truly, it has been said, that the hope of eternal beatitude is as the soul of holy poverty, which abandons earthly goods for those of eternity. Charity is the soul of religious chastity, which renounces an inferior love for a much higher one. Faith is the soul of obedience, which fulfills the orders of superiors as if they were revealed by God Himself. Thus the religious life leads truly to contemplation and to close union with God.

THE SPECIAL OBLIGATION OF THE PRIEST TO TEND TO PERFECTION

Since a religious (even a simple lay brother or a sister) has a special obligation to tend to perfection, with even greater reason the same obligation holds for a priest, even though he is not a religious. True, the priest who lives in the midst of the world is not, properly speaking, in the “state of perfection”; if he became a religious, he would have an additional merit, that of the vows of poverty and obedience.⁵³¹ Nevertheless he ought to tend to perfection, properly so called, by reason of his ordination and of his holy functions, which demand a greater interior sanctity than that required by the religious state⁵³² in a lay brother or a sister. This special obligation is not distinct from that of accomplishing holily and worthily the various duties of the priestly life. In virtue of the supreme precept, they must even be fulfilled more and more perfectly with the progress of charity, which ought to grow until death.

The basis of this obligation is ordination to the priesthood and the lofty character of the acts for which it is conferred. This ordination requires, not only the state of grace and special aptitudes, but an initial perfection (*bonitas vitae*) superior to that required for entering religion.⁵³³ The priest, in fact, ought to enlighten others, and it would be fitting that he himself should be in the illuminative way, as it would be fitting that the bishop should be in the unitive way of the perfect.

In addition, the effects of ordination are the sacerdotal character, an indelible participation in the priesthood of Christ, and sacramental grace, which makes possible the fulfillment of the priestly functions in a holy manner, as should be the case in a worthy minister of Christ.⁵³⁴ This sacramental grace is like a modality which is added to sanctifying grace, and which gives the right to receive actual helps for the holy, and indeed for the increasingly holy, accomplishment of the acts of the priestly life. This grace is like a feature of the spiritual countenance of the priest, who ought to become a minister ever more conscious of the greatness and the holy exigencies of his priesthood.

Priestly ordination is certainly superior to religious profession, and the special obligation of tending to perfection which it

establishes is surely not less. This is why during the ceremony of ordination the bishop tells the candidate for the priesthood that he must henceforth “study to live in a holy and religious manner, and to please God in all things.” If even everyone of the faithful, each according to his condition, must by reason of the supreme precept of the love of God, tend to the perfection of charity, with even greater reason is this true of the priest. We read in St. Matthew: “For he that hath, to him shall be given, and he shall abound.”⁵³⁵

Speaking on this subject to the minister of God, the author of *The Imitation of Christ* says: “Thou art made a priest and art consecrated to celebrate. See now that faithfully and devoutly, in due time, thou offer up sacrifice to God, and that thou show thyself blameless. Thou hast not lightened thy burden, but art now bound by a stricter bond of discipline and obliged to greater perfection of sanctity. A priest ought to be adorned with all virtues and set the example of a good life to others. His conversation should not be with the popular and common ways of man, but with the angels in heaven, or with perfect men upon earth.”⁵³⁶

In relation to Christ present in the Eucharist and to His mystical body, the priestly functions show better than even ordination does, this special obligation to tend to perfection. When the priest celebrates the holy Sacrifice of the Mass, he is like the figure of Him in whose name he speaks, the figure of Christ who offered Himself for us. The priest should be a minister conscious of the greatness of his functions, and he ought to strive for an ever closer union in heart and soul with the principal Priest who is at the same time the sacred Victim, sacerdos et hostia. To mount the altar steps without the firm will to grow in charity would be hypocrisy, or at least an indirectly culpable negligence. Daily the minister of Christ ought to say with greater sanctity: “*Hoc est enim corpus meum.... Hic est calix sanguinis mei.*” His Communion should be substantially more fervent each day by reason of a greater promptness of the will in the service of God, since the sacrament of the Eucharist ought not only to preserve but to increase charity in us.

Consequently St. Thomas says: “By holy orders a man is appointed to the most august ministry of serving Christ Himself in the sacrament of the altar. For this requires a greater inward holiness than that which is requisite for the religious state.”⁵³⁷ This is why, as we read in the same article, other things being equal, the priest who places an act contrary to holiness sins more grievously than a religious who is not a priest.

The sanctity becoming to the minister of God at the altar is thus described in *The Imitation of Christ*: “The priest, clad in sacred vestments, is Christ’s vicegerent that he may suppliantly and humbly pray to God for himself and all the people. He has before and behind him the sign of the cross of our Lord, that he may ever remember the passion of Christ.... Behind him he is marked with the cross, that he may learn to suffer meekly for God’s sake all the evil that men may do him. He wears the cross before him that he may bewail his own sins; and on his back, that through compassion he may lament the sins of others, and know that he is placed as mediator between God and the sinner.... When a priest celebrates, he honors God, he edifies the Church, he helps the living, he obtains rest for the departed, and makes himself partaker of all good things.”⁵³⁸

Likewise he should say the Divine Office with dignity, attention, and true piety. This great prayer of the Church is like the accompaniment of the Sacrifice of the Mass; it precedes it as a prelude, and it follows it. The Office is the canticle of the spouse of Christ from dawn until dark, and it is a great honor to take part in it. During its recitation the great intentions of the Church (for example, the pacification of the world through the extension of the kingdom of Christ) should be kept in mind.

Lastly, the priest has a special obligation to tend to perfection that he may accomplish his functions well in relation to the mystical body of Christ. For the sanctification of souls, he shares in the office which belongs first of all to the bishop, whose cooperator he should be. Thus the Council of Trent says: “Nothing leads the faithful more surely to true piety than the good example of the priest. The eyes of men rest on him as on a mirror of perfection to be imitated. So he ought to order his life, his manners, his exterior, his gestures, and his words in such a way that he may always preserve the gravity, moderation, and piety that he should have.”⁵³⁹ The priest who lives in the midst of the world is not obliged to make the vow of poverty, but he ought to be free from attachment to worldly things, willingly bestowing them upon the poor. He ought also to obey his bishop and to be the servant of the faithful in spite of difficulties and sometimes even of calumnies.

The need of this perfection appears especially for the work of preaching, of hearing confessions, and in the direction of souls. That preaching may be living and fruitful, the priest must speak from the abundance of his heart. St. Thomas even says that preaching should “proceed from the fullness of contemplation,”⁵⁴⁰ from the living, penetrating, delightful faith in the mystery of Christ, in the infinite value of the Mass, in the value of sanctifying grace and of eternal life. The priest should preach like a savior of souls, and he should work incessantly for the salvation not only of a few, but of many souls. He should not have received the priesthood in vain.

Likewise for the ministry of confession and direction, the priest must have a burning and luminous soul, a “hunger and thirst for the justice of God”; otherwise his ministry may become a danger to him; instead of saving souls, he himself may fall. If life does not ascend, it descends; and that it may not descend, it must rise like a flame. Especially in the spiritual life, he who does not advance, falls back. Finally, souls of whom the Lord is asking much, at times have recourse to the priest, and they should be able to find in him real help that they may walk truly in the way of sanctity. They should never have to go away without having,

so to speak, received something.

We have been particularly impressed with what has been said on this subject by a friend of the Cure of Ars, the venerable Father Chevrier, a priest of Lyons, who accomplished immense good in that city.⁵⁴¹ He used to tell the priests whom he trained that they should always keep the crib, Calvary, and the tabernacle before their eyes. The crib, he would say, should remind them of poverty; a priest should be poor in his dwelling, his clothing, and his food. He should be humble of spirit and of heart in his relations with God and man. The greater his poverty in this regard, the more he glorifies God and is useful to his neighbor. The priest is a man who is despoiled.

Calvary should remind him of the necessity of immolation; he ought to die, to his body, to his own mind, his will, his reputation, his family, and the world. He ought to immolate himself by silence, prayer, work, penance, suffering, and death. The more a priest dies to himself, the more life he possesses and gives to others. The true priest is a crucified man.

The tabernacle should remind him of the charity he ought to have. He ought to give his body, mind, time, goods, health, and life. He should give others life by his faith, doctrine, words, prayer, powers, and example. The priest should be like good bread; he is a man who is consumed.

This was the teaching of Father Chevrier, who opened a catechism class in Lyons for the most abandoned children. To gain admission it sufficed "to possess nothing, to know nothing, to be worth nothing." His supernatural life was such that he made true Christians and often great Christians of many of these children. With a minimum of material resources, he thus reaped a truly exceptional supernatural harvest.

Such is the ideal of the priesthood which every priest ought to keep before his eyes, at the same time recalling what St. Paul says: "But I most gladly will spend and be spent myself for your souls; although loving you more, I be loved less."⁵⁴² He would do well also to recall the words of Christ: "I have given you an example, that as I have done to you, so you do also."⁵⁴³

THE IDEAL OF EPISCOPAL PERFECTION ACCORDING TO ST. ISIDORE⁵⁴⁴

"It is necessary that he who will be raised up to teach and instruct the people in virtue, should be holy in all things, and in no way reprehensible. He who convinces another of sin, should himself be free from sin. First of all, he who seeks to admonish others to live well ought to correct himself; so that in all things he himself may furnish an example of living and incite all to good work by teaching and work. For him a knowledge of Scripture also is necessary; for if the life of a bishop is so holy, to him alone, thus living, it is profitable. Besides, if he shall be learned in doctrine and speech, he can also instruct others and teach his people, and repulse adversaries who, unless they can be refuted and convicted, may easily pervert the hearts of the simple.

"His speech should be pure, simple, open, full of gravity and honesty, sweetness and grace, treating of the mystery of the law, of the doctrine of faith, of the virtue of continency, of the discipline of justice; admonishing by various exhortations each and every one according to the profession and quality of established customs... whose special office it is to read Scripture, to peruse the canons, to imitate the examples of the saints, to practice vigils, fastings, and prayers; to have peace with his brethren, not to tear to pieces any of those committed to his care; to damn no one unless he be proved guilty, to excommunicate no one unless he has been tried. He ought to be outstanding alike in humility and authority, so that he may not cause the vices of his subjects to grow through excessive humility. Nor should he exercise the power of severity without moderation, but should be so much the more cautious toward those committed to his care, as he fears to be more severely examined by Christ.

"He will also have charity which is supereminent among all gifts, without which all virtue is nothing. Charity is, indeed, the guardian of chastity. Humility, moreover, is the place where it is kept. He will likewise have, among all these things, eminent chastity: thus, as his mind is given to Christ, he should be spotless and free from carnal impurity. Among these things, it behoves him to take care of the poor with careful distribution, to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, receive pilgrims, redeem captives, protect widows and orphans, show prudent care in all things, provide with careful discretion. Hospitality should likewise be outstanding in him, that he may receive all with benignity and charity. If, indeed, all the faithful would like to hear those words of the Gospel: 'I was a stranger, and you took me in,' how much more, should the bishop, who ought to be the receiver of all diverse peoples?"

This page shows clearly what should be understood by the commonly accepted expression, that bishops are in the state of perfection (*in statu perfectionis exercendae*) to be exercised. Hence it is fitting, as has so often been said, that they should be in the unitive way.

The religious state is one in which man tends to perfection, *status perfectionis acquirendae*. To form a proper idea of it, one should read and meditate on the admirable pages in the Rule of St. Benedict on religious perfection and union with God, which ought daily to become more intimate in a life consecrated to the Lord. It would be profitable to study also what is said from the same comprehensive point of view about religious perfection by Blessed Humbert of the Romans, in his *Expositio Regulae B. Augustini et super Constitutiones Fratrum Praedicatorum*.⁵⁴⁵ This work is a golden book for the formation of religious and for

their preparation for the different offices to which obedience may assign them.

The Three Ages of the Spiritual life According to the Fathers and the Great Spiritual Writers

We have discussed what constitutes Christian perfection and the obligation to tend to it, either by the common way or by the special way of the effective practice of the three evangelical counsels of poverty, chastity, and obedience. We must now consider the distinction between the three ages of the spiritual life, commonly called the age of beginners, that of proficients, and that of the perfect, or in other terms, the purgative, illuminative, and unitive ways.

We shall see, first of all, how the problem of the three ages of the spiritual life is stated, and then the answer found in the testimony of the fathers and in that of the doctors who followed them.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

One of the greatest problems of spirituality is in what sense we must understand the traditional division of the “three ways, the purgative, illuminative, and unitive,” according to the terminology used by Dionysius, or the states of “beginners, proficients, and the perfect,” according to an earlier terminology preserved by St. Thomas.⁵⁴⁶

As we have already indicated in chapter one (sections 5, 6, and 7), two notably different interpretations of this traditional division have been given, according as the infused contemplation of the mysteries of faith and the union with God which results from it are considered as belonging to the normal way of sanctity, or as not only extrinsically but intrinsically extraordinary favors.

This divergence of interpretation appears if one compares the division of ascetical-mystical theology generally followed until the second half of the eighteenth century with that given by several authors who have written since that period. We noted⁵⁴⁷ that this divergence is evident if a comparison is made, for example, between the treatise of Vallgornera, O.P. *Mystica theologia divi Thomae* (1662), and the two works of Scaramelli, S.J., *Direttorio ascetico* (1751) and *Direttorio mistico*. Vallgornera, closely following the Carmelite, Philip of the Blessed Trinity, connects the latter’s division with that of earlier authors and with certain characteristic texts from the works of St. John of the Cross on the period when the passive purifications of the senses and of the spirit generally appear.⁵⁴⁸

The following division made by Vallgornera shows what these authors considered the characteristics of the three ages of the spiritual life:

1) *The purgative way* or stage, proper to beginners, in which it is a question of the active purification of the external and internal senses, of the passions, of the intellect, and of the will, by mortification, meditation, prayer; and finally, it is a question of the passive purification of the senses, in which infused contemplation begins and by means of which the soul is raised to the illuminative way, as St. John of the Cross says.⁵⁴⁹

2) *The illuminative way* or state, proper to proficients, in which, after a preliminary chapter on the divisions of contemplation, are discussed the gifts of the Holy Ghost and infused contemplation, which proceeds principally from the gifts of understanding and wisdom, and which is declared desirable for all interior souls, as being morally necessary for the full perfection of Christian life. This second part of the work, after several articles relating to extraordinary graces (visions, revelations, interior words), ends with a chapter of nine articles relative to the passive purification of the spirit, which marks the passage to the unitive way. This again is what St. John of the Cross taught.⁵⁵⁰

3) *The unitive life* or stage, proper to the perfect, in which it is a question of the intimate union of the contemplative soul with God and of its degrees up to the transforming union.

Like Philip of the Blessed Trinity and many others,⁵⁵¹ Vallgornera considers this division traditional, truly conformable to the doctrine of the fathers, to the principles of St. Thomas, and to the teaching of St. John of the Cross and the greatest mystics who have written on the three ages of the spiritual life. It harmonizes fully with these two capital texts from the writings of the Carmelite doctor: “The passive purification of the senses is common. It takes place in the greater number of beginners.”⁵⁵² “The soul began to set out on the way of the spirit, the way of proficients, which is also called the illuminative way or the way of infused contemplation, wherein God Himself teaches and refreshes the soul without meditation or any active efforts.”⁵⁵³ From this point of view, the infused contemplation of the mysteries of faith is manifestly in the normal way of sanctity. This is not at all surprising, since it proceeds from faith enlightened by the gifts of understanding and of wisdom, which are found in all the just.

However, the division given by Scaramelli and those who followed him is quite different. In his *Direttorio ascetico*, Scaramelli intends to describe the ordinary way which leads to Christian perfection. In this work he does not discuss, so to speak, the gifts of the Holy Ghost or the contemplation which proceeds from them. In his *Direttorio mistico*, he treats of infused contemplation as an extraordinary grace,⁵⁵⁴ and only at the very end does he speak of the passive purification of the senses (tr. V); whereas, for St. John of the Cross, as we have said, this purification is like a second conversion which marks the entrance into the illuminative way.

The divergence between this new manner of looking at the matter and the preceding one springs manifestly from the fact that the early authors, as opposed to the more recent, maintained that all truly interior souls may humbly ask for and keenly desire the grace of the infused contemplation of the mysteries of faith, of the Incarnation, of the passion of Christ, of the Sacrifice of the Mass, of the Blessed Trinity present in us, and of eternal life, mysteries which are so many manifestations of the infinite goodness of God. They considered this supernatural and confused contemplation morally necessary for close union with God, in which the full perfection of Christian life consists. It is from this point of view that they determined the characteristics of each of the three ages of the spiritual life.

With the above statement in mind, the question may obviously be put in the following terms: Is the idea generally accepted until the second half of the eighteenth century true? Has it a basis in Scripture, in tradition, and in the very principles of theology? We shall examine these different points.

THE TESTIMONY OF SCRIPTURE

We shall cite only some of the more important texts, after the already numerous ones which we adduced above. We have seen⁵⁵⁵ in the light of the Gospel, according to the eight beatitudes, how lofty Christian perfection is. We have also seen that it cannot be obtained without the mortification of all that is inordinate in us,⁵⁵⁶ without the cross borne with patience,⁵⁵⁷ without prayer to the Father hidden in the secret of our hearts,⁵⁵⁸ without docility to the inspirations of the Holy Ghost,⁵⁵⁹ which should characterize “the true adorers... in spirit and in truth.”⁵⁶⁰ Is this not, under a special influence of the Holy Ghost, the loving contemplation of the mysteries of salvation?

St. Paul tells us also what is normally proper to the spiritual age of the perfect when he writes: “Howbeit we speak wisdom among the perfect... the wisdom of God in a mystery, a wisdom which is hidden, which God ordained before the world, unto our glory.... Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man, what things God hath prepared for them that love Him. But to us God hath revealed them by His Spirit; for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God.”⁵⁶¹ Is this not what the perfect contemplate?

St. Paul writes likewise to the Ephesians: “I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, of whom all paternity in heaven and earth is named, that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened by His Spirit with might unto the inward man; that Christ may dwell by faith in your hearts; that, being rooted and founded in charity, you may be able to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth: to know also the charity of Christ, which surpasseth all knowledge, that you may be filled unto all the fulness of God.”⁵⁶² Is not this what characterizes the age of the perfect: the infused contemplation of the mystery of Christ and the union with God which results from it? We shall see that the Greek and Latin fathers thus understood these inspired words, which they never tired of repeating.

First of all, let us note, as several writers have observed, that in the spiritual life of the apostles themselves, who were trained directly by Christ, there are three distinct phases which correspond to the three ages of the spiritual life.⁵⁶³

The first phase of their interior life, that of beginners, extends from their conversion up to the Passion, when they passed through a profound crisis, during which Peter went so far as to deny his Master. Immediately afterwards he repented. This was his second conversion, which took place in that true passive purification, the dark night of the Passion. Something similar occurred in the life of the other apostles when, by the grace of the Savior, they again got control of themselves after having abandoned Him.

The second phase of their interior life, that of proficients, extends from the Passion to Pentecost. They were still fearful; their faith still needed to be enlightened, their hope to be strengthened, their charity to be endowed with the necessary zeal. This phase was completed by the great privation of the sensible presence of Christ after His ascension into heaven. They had to continue their way in naked faith, with the prospect of the persecutions which had been announced to them.

The third phase began with Pentecost, which was for them like a third conversion, a true passive purification of the spirit and a spiritual transformation which introduced them into the perfect life. This purification greatly enlightened their souls, and greatly strengthened their wills to preach everywhere Christ crucified. This third phase of their interior life was marked by an increasingly closer union with God and deeper self-oblation, even to martyrdom.

Farther on, we shall return to the subject of these three phases of the interior life of the apostles, each phase of which began by a conversion or a transformation of the soul. If a person reflects deeply on this subject before God in prayer, he will find in

it a true light on the three ages of the spiritual life. These indications given by Scripture are, moreover, confirmed by what the fathers tell us.

THE TESTIMONY OF TRADITION

In recent years special study has been made of the doctrine of the Greek and Latin fathers on these three periods in the interior life of every Christian striving for sanctity. We shall recall here what seems most certain in their teaching.⁵⁶⁴ We shall consider, first of all, the testimony of the Greek fathers. Among the apostolic fathers, St. Ignatius of Antioch often speaks in his letters of the spiritual and mystical presence of Christ in the Church and in the faithful. He exhorts the faithful by telling them that they are Christophores (Christ-bearers) or Theophores (God-bearers). He says to them: "Let us perform all our actions with the thought that God dwells in us. We shall thus be His temples, and He Himself will be our God, dwelling in us (cf. Eph. 15: 3)." St. Ignatius of Antioch strongly aspires to live more and more intimately with Christ and to die in order to be definitively united with Him. His letters are filled with that lofty knowledge of Christ, at once living and penetrating, which is nothing else but contemplation and which overflows in a most abundant apostolic activity, the fruit of a great charity. But to reach this very close union with God and the Savior, we must have contempt for self, for all that is inordinate in us, for everything that lessens the divine life in us.⁵⁶⁵ In this period of persecution, St. Ignatius desires to be ground by the teeth of beasts in order to become the wheat of Christ, as Christ was ground to become our Eucharistic bread.

In the second century, St. Irenaeus insists on the fact that man ought to allow himself to be formed by God like clay in the potter's hands. Instead of resisting, of shrinking away from the imprint of the divine hand, he should be increasingly docile to the Holy Ghost in prayer and action, and then he will come to judge spiritually of all things and to live only on the love of God.⁵⁶⁶

At the end of the second century, Clement of Alexandria (in his *Stromata*)⁵⁶⁷ describes the spiritual ascent, every phase of which brings the soul closer to the state of the perfect man that St. Paul speaks of to the Ephesians.⁵⁶⁸ Clement conceives of these successive states through which interior souls pass as spiritual mansions.⁵⁶⁹ These states he characterizes as follows: first of all, the fear of God dominates,⁵⁷⁰ then faith and hope,⁵⁷¹ and finally, charity and wisdom.⁵⁷² Now, the fear of God is the least elevated of the gifts of the Holy Ghost, and wisdom is the highest of all, according to the descending enumeration given by Isaias (II: 2 f.). The gift of wisdom bestows peace, which springs also from charity, the highest of the virtues.

According to Clement of Alexandria, the perfect are tranquilized souls in which charity dominates. According to the expression of St. Paul, they have attained to the state of the "perfect man, unto the measure of the age of the fulness of Christ" (Eph. 4: 13).²⁸ They have received the mysterious and hidden wisdom which St. Paul preached "among the perfect" (I Cor. 2: 6). Clement calls this wisdom the *gnosis*. It is a religious contemplation springing from the inspiration of the Holy Ghost in the docile soul and transforming our interior life, making us friends of God.⁵⁷³

Origen, like his master Clement of Alexandria, says that the perfect man lives especially by charity, and that ordinarily he receives from the Holy Ghost infused wisdom, intimate knowledge of the divinity of Christ⁵⁷⁴ and of the mystery of the Blessed Trinity.⁵⁷⁵ Origen, in his commentary on St. John 1: 6, even writes: "No one can grasp the meaning of the Gospel (of St. John, which is consecrated to the divinity of Christ) unless he has rested on the breast of Jesus, and unless he has received from Him, Mary, who becomes his mother also."⁵⁷⁶ According to Origen, the Word reveals Himself to the perfect and trains their souls, as He trained those of the apostles. In the most beautiful pages of his Commentary on St. Matthew 12: 15–20, Origen admirably describes this training of the Twelve by the Savior.⁵⁷⁷

Origen distinguishes three stages:⁵⁷⁸ that of beginners, in whom inordinate passions lose their strength; that of proficients, in whom these passions begin to die out under the abundance of the grace of the Holy Ghost; finally, that of the perfect. He recommends docility to the Holy Ghost, through whom we can go to Christ, and through Him rise even to the Father in the contemplation which solitude favors.

Didymus the Blind and the Cappadocian fathers teach the same doctrine. Didymus, whose teaching is marked by the depth of his piety, invites every Christian to close union with Christ, whom he calls the Spouse of holy souls, an expression taken from the parable of the wise and foolish virgins.⁵⁷⁹

St. Basil, who organized monastic life in Cappadocia and Pontus, set forth the principles of this life and their application in his Greater Rules and his Lesser Rules.⁵⁸⁰ His spirituality is firm, solid, and serious, and prepares souls for contemplation and union with God. In the preface of his book on the monastic rules, he says: "When the eye of the soul becomes pure and shadowless, it contemplates divine things, thanks to a light from on high, which fills it abundantly without satiating it.... After undergoing painful combats and succeeding in freeing the spirit, in spite of its close union with matter, from the melange of sensible passions, it becomes capable of conversing with God.... He who has reached this state ought no longer to permit the vapors of vile passions to trouble and to cover the gaze of his soul with a thick veil, and thus to make him lose spiritual and divine contemplation." St. Basil expresses the same idea in his explanation of Psalms 32. and 44, and in his first homily on

faith. Progressive purification is the condition of union with God in contemplation.

St. Gregory of Nazianzus likewise says that God is substantial light,⁵⁸¹ which a person can grasp only by himself becoming light,⁵⁸² and by purifying his soul in order to rise from fear to wisdom,⁵⁸³ that is, from the lowest of the gifts of the Holy Ghost to the highest. It will be observed that all these authors use three terms: purification, illumination, union.

St. Gregory of Nyssa, in his *De vita Moysis*,⁵⁸⁴ in which the life of Moses serves only as the outward framework for the development of the spiritual life, shows that we must detach ourselves from creatures and live by Christ in order to be “admitted to the contemplation of the divine nature” and to union with God. This, says the saint, constitutes a victory over the enemy, a victory obtained only by the cross and by the progressive purification of one’s intellect from all that is sensible and material. In his treatise *De virginitate*,⁵⁸⁵ the same father shows that perfection makes the soul the spouse of Christ, a theme which he also develops in his homilies on the *Canticle of Canticles*.⁵⁸⁶

St. Ephrem, who considered Christian life a spiritual combat, regards contemplation obtained by docility to the Holy Ghost as the privilege of the perfect life. In his treatise *De virtute*, chapter 10, he says: “When we have conquered our passions, destroyed every inordinate natural affection in ourselves, and emptied our minds of every preoccupation useless to salvation, then the Holy Ghost, finding our souls at rest, and communicating a new power to our intellects, will put light into our hearts, as we light a lamp that has already been provided with wick and oil.... Therefore, above all things, let us prepare our souls for the reception of the divine light, and so render ourselves worthy of the gifts of God.” The way of union with God is through purification and the light which the Holy Ghost gives.⁵⁸⁷

In the fifth century, Diadochus taught this doctrine in his *Chapters on Spiritual Perfection*,⁹⁴² and Dionysius the Mystic (the PseudoAreopagite) repeatedly speaks in well-known texts of purification, illumination, and the unitive or perfect way.⁵⁸⁸ The unitive way belongs to the mystical order; it is the normal prelude of eternal life. According to Dionysius, purification prepares a lofty knowledge of God, illumination communicates it, and sanctification makes it expand completely in the soul.

Among the Greek fathers of the seventh century, St. Maximus develops this doctrine and distinguishes three degrees of prayer corresponding to the three degrees of charity: “Simple prayer is like bread; it comforts beginners. When a little contemplation is added to prayer, it is like oil with which one refreshes oneself; pure contemplation is like a wine of exquisite flavor which lifts those who drink it out of themselves.”⁵⁸⁹ “Contemplation proceeds from an illumination of the Holy Ghost.”⁵⁹⁰ “He who is purified is enlightened and merits to penetrate into the innermost sanctuary and there enjoy the embraces of the Word.”⁵⁹¹ St. Maximus also noted clearly the severe trials which contemplatives must undergo, the crucible through which they must pass that they may be fully purified and firmly established in the love of God.⁵⁹²

In the eighth century, St. John Damascene says also that infused contemplation is generally granted to the perfect: “He who has reached the highest degree of love, going out of himself, so to speak, discovers Him who cannot be seen. Taking his flight above this cloud of the senses which arrests the gaze of the spirit and establishing himself in peace, he fixes his gaze on the Sun of justice and enjoys this spectacle which he can never tire of.”⁵⁹³ “To have attained to the contemplation of the Creator by the generous practice of virtues is a treasure that will not be snatched away.”⁵⁹⁴

Therefore, according to the Greek fathers, supernatural contemplation, proceeding from the gift of wisdom, is in the normal way of sanctity. It begins with the age of proficients and ordinarily accompanies the charity of the perfect.

The Latin fathers, in particular St. Augustine and St. Gregory the Great, present the same teaching. In *De quantitate animae* (chap. 33, nos. 70–76), St. Augustine distinguishes several degrees. He insists on the struggle against sin, the difficult work of purification, followed by the entrance into light for those who are purified and finally by divine union (*mansio in luce*). Later, in his commentary on the Sermon on the Mount,⁵⁹⁵ he describes the ascending progress of the soul toward God, according to the gradation of the gifts of the Holy Ghost. The fear of God is the first degree of the spiritual life; wisdom its summit. Between these two extremes, he distinguishes a double period of purifying preparation for wisdom: a remote preparation, called the active life, which is the active practice of the moral virtues that correspond to the gifts of piety, fortitude, knowledge, and counsel; then a proximate preparation, called the contemplative life,⁵⁹⁶ which is the eminent exercise of the theological virtues and of the gifts of understanding and wisdom in souls established in peace and docile to grace. Faith, enlightened by these gifts, is then the principle of contemplation, and ardent charity unites the soul closely to God. Thus the labors of the active life prepare for contemplation, in which the purified soul enjoys the divine light, the pledge of eternal life. This contemplation which proceeds from the gift of wisdom is, in truth, infused contemplation.⁵⁹⁷

In the fifth century, Cassian in his Conferences, or lessons in spirituality, especially in the ninth and tenth, shows that the end of the spiritual life on earth is divine contemplation, which Cassian regards as the perfect exercise of the love of God. The soul prepares for it by prayer in order to obtain the pardon of sins committed, by the practice of the virtues and a lively desire for a greater charity for itself and its neighbor.⁵⁹⁸ Then prayer ends by becoming “a prayer all of fire,”⁵⁹⁹ which “is formed by the contemplation of God alone and by the ardor of a burning charity.”⁶⁰⁰ “Thus the soul begins to taste in an earthen vessel the first fruits of the glory which it hopes for in heaven.”⁶⁰¹

It is well known that Cassian's *Conferences* were over a long period the current book of spiritual reading. St. Thomas read them often, and preserved Cassian's doctrine in speaking of the gift of wisdom, whose progress accompanies that of charity.

In the sixth century, St. Gregory the Great also admits the division of the three degrees of the spiritual life: the struggle against sin,⁶⁰² then the active life or the practice of the virtues,⁶⁰³ and the contemplative life, which is that of the perfect,⁶⁰⁴ and which he declares necessary for apostles or preachers of the word of God⁶⁰⁵ and for those who wish to attain perfection.⁶⁰⁶ In this teaching, St. Gregory shows himself the disciple of St. Augustine. In his opinion all the works of the Christian life have their full perfection only if souls are illumined by the superior lights of contemplation.⁶⁰⁷ It is the end of asceticism, the fruit of a special inspiration of the Holy Ghost, the exercise of the gift of wisdom.⁶⁰⁸ Clearly meant is an infused contemplation,⁶⁰⁹ for which one prepares especially by humility, purity of heart, and habitual recollection.

St. Gregory also noted the painful passive purifications later described by Hugh of St. Victor, Tauler, and especially St. John of the Cross.⁶¹⁰ St. Gregory insists on the fact that these purifications "dry up all sensual affection in us"⁶¹¹ and thus prepare us for contemplation and union with God, wherein we find great strength in trial and ardent charity.

St. Bernard preserves all this teaching, and speaks in his *Sermon*⁶¹² of the humble and burning desire for contemplation. If these desires are ardent, they are, in his opinion, heard and granted; but men of desire are only too rare. St. Bernard often describes the union with God which results from infused contemplation and the alternate succession of the presence and absence of the Word, the Spouse of the soul.⁶¹³

The same doctrine is also found in Hugh of St. Victor, who insists on the passive purifications of the soul,⁶¹⁴ in Richard of St. Victor,⁶¹⁵ in St. Bonaventure,⁶¹⁶ who was fond of the terminology, which Dionysius used habitually, of the purgative, illuminative, and unitive ways.

St. Thomas, as we shall see, preserves the distinction between beginners, proficient, and the perfect.⁶¹⁷ This distinction is clarified by what he says in his *Commentary on St. Matthew* (chap. 5) about the beatitudes of the flight from sin, of those of the active life, and of those of the contemplative life. In this commentary he describes the ascent of the soul as St. Augustine and St. Gregory did.⁶¹⁸

THE THREE AGES OF THE SPIRITUAL LIFE AND THOSE OF THE CORPOREAL LIFE

St. Thomas⁶¹⁹ compares the three ages of the spiritual life with those of the corporeal life: childhood, adolescence, and maturity. We should note this analogy, and in particular the transition from one period to another.

It is generally admitted that first childhood ceases on the awakening of reason about the seventh year. This period is followed by a sort of second childhood which lasts until the period of adolescence, about the fourteenth year. Adolescence extends from the fourteenth to the twentieth year; then comes maturity, which is divided into the period which precedes full maturity, and that which, from about the thirty-fifth year onward, follows before the decline of old age.

Psychologists point out that mentality changes with the transformations of the organism. The child follows chiefly the imagination and the impulses of the sensible appetites. He does not yet discern, nor does he organize rationally; even when his reason begins to awaken, it remains extremely dependent on his senses. On leaving childhood, about the fourteenth year, at the period of puberty, there is not only an organic, but a psychological, intellectual, and moral transformation. The adolescent is no longer content to follow his imagination; he begins to reflect on the affairs of human life, on the necessity of preparing himself for a certain profession or life-work. This period of transition, called the awkward age, is not without difficulty: then, about the fourteenth year, the adolescent's moral personality begins to take shape with a sense of honor and of good reputation, or he may become perverted and begin to go wrong, unless he becomes a retarded, unstable, abnormal person.

Here the analogy throws light on the spiritual life. We shall see that the beginner who does not become a proficient, as he should, turns out badly or remains a retarded, tepid soul, and, as it were, a spiritual dwarf. As the fathers, particularly St. Bernard,⁶²⁰ so often say: "He who does not advance, falls back." To refuse to become better, is to fall back, whereas to tend persistently toward perfection, is, in a sense, already to possess it.⁶²¹

To continue the analogy, if the crisis of puberty, which is at once both physical and moral, is a difficult period through which to pass, the same is true of another crisis, which may be called that of first liberty, which introduces the adolescent into maturity at about the twentieth year. The young man, who is then fully formed physically, must begin to take his place in the life of society. Some pass through this period badly, abuse the liberty given them, and, like the prodigal son, confound liberty with license. On the other hand, the adult who develops normally and takes the good road concerns himself with matters of individual, family, and social life in a manner superior to that of the adolescent. The adult is engrossed in more general questions. Unless he has received a higher vocation from God, he himself founds a home that he may in his turn become an educator.

Something similar exists in the spiritual life. When the proficient who is, so to speak, in the period of spiritual adolescence, reaches the more advanced age of the perfect, his mentality rises as it becomes spiritual, and it grows more and more

supernatural. He sees with increasing clearness not only the things that pertain to individual, family, and social life, but those that have to do with the reign of God or the life of the Church in their relation to eternal life.

We should like particularly to emphasize here the differences which separate the three ages of the spiritual life and to explain how the transition is made from one to the other. As St. Thomas observes: “The divers degrees of charity are distinguished according to the different pursuits (studia) to which man is brought by the increase of charity. For at first it is incumbent on man to occupy himself chiefly with avoiding sin and resisting his concupiscences, which move him in opposition to charity. This concerns beginners, in whom charity has to be fed or fostered lest it be destroyed. In the second place, man’s chief pursuit is to aim at progress in good, and this is the pursuit of the proficient, whose principal aim is to strengthen their charity by adding to it: man’s third pursuit is to aim chiefly at union with God and enjoyment of Him: this belongs to the perfect who ‘desire to be dissolved and to be with Christ’ (Phil. 1:23).”⁶²²

These are the three stages of progress toward sanctity; but what is important to add, and has been admirably observed by St. John of the Cross, is the transition from one spiritual age to another, a transition analogous to that in the order of corporeal life. As there is the crisis of puberty between childhood and adolescence, there is a similar crisis between the purgative life of beginners and the illuminative life of proficients. This crisis has been described by several great spiritual writers, notably by Tauler,⁶²³ especially by St. John of the Cross, under the title of the “passive purification of the senses,”⁶²⁴ by Father Lallemant, S.J., under the name of “second conversion.”⁶²⁵ As a matter of fact, this crisis recalls the second conversion of Peter during the dark night of the Passion.

At this point, the generous beginner, who runs the risk of standing still in many unconscious defects, in particular of dwelling on sensible consolations in his spiritual exercises, is deprived of these consolations that he may be introduced into a spiritual way that is much more detached from the senses, a way in which he finds in aridity a beginning of contemplation which the Holy Ghost grants him in order to make him advance. This is St. John’s teaching: “The first night, or sensual purgation, wherein the soul is purified or detached, will be of the senses, subjecting them to the spirit.... The night of sense is common, and the lot of many: these are the beginners.”⁶²⁶ They begin to understand clearly that one must be truly poor in spirit, truly humble, in order to grow in charity. One must renounce all the more or less gross or subtle follies of vanity, pride, and spiritual sensuality. The holy doctor adds: “When the house of sensuality was at rest, that is, when the passions were mortified, concupiscence quenched, the desires subdued and lulled to sleep in the blessed night of the purgation of sense, the soul began to set out on the way of the spirit, the way of proficients, which is also called the illuminative way, or the way of infused contemplation, wherein God Himself teaches and refreshes the soul without meditation or any active efforts that itself may deliberately make (at least quite generally in prayer).... Such... is this night and purgation of the senses.”⁶²⁷

The words we have italicized in this text are very significant and reproduce exactly the original Spanish. Following the example of St. Augustine, Cajetan, St. Bernard, St. Bonaventure, St. Thomas, Tauler, and others, St. John of the Cross, it should be noted, speaks of the illuminative way in the full, strong meaning of the term, and not of an illuminative way that is, so to speak, diminished, such as exists in those who have only partially profited by the passive purification of the senses, as the saint points out.⁶²⁸

Finally, farther on when speaking of proficients,⁶²⁹ St. John of the Cross treats of the imperfections proper to the advanced or proficients. He declares that there is still in them natural rudeness, a distraction and dissipation of mind, presumption, and subtle and secret pride. These defects show the necessity of the passive purification of the spirit in order to enter the perfect unitive way, that of those who, as St. Thomas says: “aim chiefly at union with God and enjoyment of Him... and who ‘desire to be dissolved and to be with Christ.’”⁶³⁰

This trial of the passive purification of the spirit is a crisis analogous to that which occurs in the natural order when the adolescent becomes an adult and makes use of his liberty, sometimes to his cost. At this point in the spiritual order, there is, as it were, a third conversion,⁶³¹ or better a transformation of soul which recalls what Pentecost was for the apostles, when, after being deprived of the presence of Christ, who had ascended into heaven, they were enlightened and fortified by the Holy Ghost, who thus prepared them for the severe persecutions they would have to undergo and who made them perfect ministers of the Savior.⁶³²

St. John of the Cross is assuredly describing spiritual progress as it appears especially among contemplatives, and more particularly in those who are the most generous in striving to reach union with God as directly as possible. He thus shows the superior laws of the life of grace in all their loftiness. But these laws apply also in an attenuated manner in many others who do not reach such a lofty perfection, but who, nevertheless, advance generously without turning back. Attentive reading of the history of the interior life of the servants of God, reveals, in their interior sufferings and their progress, this profound purification of the senses and spirit, so that all their faculties may at length be fully subjected to God present in them in the depths of their souls.

St. John of the Cross, better than anyone else, noted these two crises of the transition from one age to another, and he rightly called them the passive purifications of the senses and the spirit. Manifestly they correspond well to the nature of the human

soul (to its two parts, the sensible and the spiritual). They correspond also to the nature of the divine seed, to sanctifying grace, the germ of eternal life, which ought more and more to vivify our lower and higher faculties and to inspire all our acts until the depths of our souls are purified of all egoism, of all more or less conscious self-love, and in truth belong entirely to God.⁶³³

Keeping this fact in mind, we can understand that Vallgornera should have followed this lofty idea of the three ages of the spiritual life in dividing his work *Theologia mystica divi Thomae*. In doing so he concurred, as we said in the beginning of this chapter, with the Carmelites, Philip of the Blessed Trinity, Anthony of the Holy Ghost, and many others. Thus is preserved the tradition of the fathers, of Clement of Alexandria, Cajetan, St. Augustine, Dionysius, St. Bernard, St. Anselm, Hugh, Richard of St. Victor, St. Albert the Great, St. Bonaventure, and St. Thomas, whose doctrine on the gifts of the Holy Ghost thus appears in its full development.

To sum up what we have just said, we shall give a table that coincides approximately with one agreed on by several of the authors we have just named.⁶³⁴

In beginners may be noted, with the first degree of charity, the initial virtues or the first degree of meekness, patience, chastity, and humility. Interior and exterior mortification makes them more and more avoid deliberate venial sins, or induces them to rise immediately from mortal sin should they fall into it. Their prayer is vocal, their meditation is discursive and tends to be transformed into simplified affective prayer. In them the gifts of the Holy Ghost begin to appear, but they are still rather latent. From time to time they have special inspirations from the Holy Ghost, but as yet little aptitude to profit by them. Docility to the Holy Ghost remains feeble; the soul is, above all, conscious of its activity and must frequently recognize its indigence.⁶³⁵

The soul experiences its poverty in the crisis of sensible aridity of the passive purification of the senses, a painful purification more or less well borne, which marks the transition to the illuminative way, which has not been diminished and is truly worthy of its name.⁶³⁶

In proficient, with the second degree of charity, appear the solid virtues which are no longer merely initial virtues; in particular, meekness and patience, a more genuine humility, which leads to benevolence toward one's neighbor, and the spirit of the three counsels of poverty, chastity, and filial obedience to God recognized as present in the superiors placed over us. With these solid virtues, the gifts of the Holy Ghost begin to manifest themselves, especially the three less elevated gifts of fear, knowledge, and piety. The soul, more docile now, profits more from interior inspirations and illuminations. If the proficient is truly generous, then infused prayer ordinarily begins by isolated acts of infused contemplation in the course of the acquired prayer of recollection. Then, if the soul is faithful, little by little come the prayers of supernatural recollection and of quiet (arid or consoled), in which may be seen a manifest influence of the gift of piety, which makes us cry: "Abba, Father," as St. Paul says.⁶³⁷ Here, truly, the soul's intimate conversation with itself becomes a conversation with God. Then, if the soul is generous, it sees in itself faults of subtle pride, of lack of benevolence toward its neighbor, sometimes of hardness, of lack of zeal for the salvation of so many souls that are being lost. These defects which did not at first appear to the soul, require a new passive purification, that of the spirit.⁶³⁸

In spite of certain, as it were involuntary, imperfections, the perfect have, with the third degree of charity, eminent and even heroic virtues: great meekness, almost unalterable patience, profound humility which does not fear scorn and loves even humiliations, a great spirit of faith which leads the soul to see all things as coming from the hand of God, great confidence in God, magnanimity which causes the soul to tend to great things in spite of obstacles and rebuffs, and perfect abandonment to the will of God. The gifts of understanding and wisdom then manifest themselves more strikingly and frequently. The soul is, as it were, dominated by the Holy Ghost, who inspires it also to a more perfect practice of the virtues.

Ordinarily at this time, there is the infused prayer of union under the more and more marked influence of the gift of wisdom.⁶³⁹ The center of the soul is finally purified; and the higher and lower faculties are fully subject to God intimately present in the inner sanctuary. In the penumbra of faith, this is eternal life begun, or the normal prelude of beatitude which ought never to end.

Beginners (purgative way) Ascetical life	Proficients (illuminative way) Threshold of the mystical life	The Perfect (unitive way) Mystical life	Degrees of Charity
<i>Initial virtues, first degree of charity, temperance, chastity, patience, first degrees of humility.</i>	<i>Solid virtues, second degree of charity, obedience, more profound humility; spirit of the counsels</i>	<i>Eminent and heroic virtues, third degree of charity, perfect humility, great spirit of faith, abandonment, almost unalterable patience.</i>	Virtues
<i>Gifts of the Holy Ghost rather latent, inspirations at rare intervals, slight aptitude as yet to profit by them. The soul is especially conscious of its activity.</i>	<i>The gifts of the Holy Ghost begin to manifest themselves, especially the three inferior gifts of fear, knowledge, and piety. The soul, more docile now, profits more from inspirations and interior illuminations.</i>	<i>The higher gifts manifest themselves more notably and frequently. The soul is, as it were, dominated by the Holy Ghost. Great passivity in His regard, which does not exclude the activity of the virtues</i>	Gifts
<i>Active purification of the senses and of the spirit, or exterior and interior mortification.</i>	<i>Passive purification of the senses, under the influence especially of the gifts of fear and knowledge. Concomitant trials. Entrance into the illuminative way.</i>	<i>Purification of the spirit under the influence especially of the gift of understanding. Concomitant trials in which are manifested the gifts of fortitude and of counsel. Entrance into the perfect unitive way</i>	Purifications
<i>Acquired prayer: vocal prayer, discursive prayer, affective prayer, which becomes more and more simple, called the prayer of active recollection.</i>	<i>Initial infused prayer, isolated acts of infused contemplation in the course of the acquired prayer of recollection; then, prayers of supernatural recollection and of arid or consoled quiet. The gift of piety.</i>	<i>Infused prayers of simple union, of complete union (sometimes ecstatic), of transforming union, under the more and more marked influence of the gift of wisdom. Concomitant favors.</i>	Prayers
First and second mansions	Third and fourth mansions	Fifth, sixth, and seventh mansions	Mansions of St. Teresa

This spiritual progress may be expressed by the preceding summary, which should be read from the bottom up in order better to see that the passive purifications of the senses and the spirit are found at the entrance to the illuminative and unitive ways.

Spiritual Reading of Scripture, of the Works and Lives of the Saints

After discussing the sources of the interior life and the end to be attained, which is Christian perfection, we should consider the exterior helps found in the reading of spiritual works and in spiritual direction.

Among the great means of sanctification offered to all, should be included spiritual reading, especially that of Holy Scripture, of the works of the masters of the interior life, and of the lives of the saints. In this chapter we shall discuss this subject, and point out the dispositions necessary to draw profit from such reading.

HOLY SCRIPTURE AND THE LIFE OF THE SOUL

Error, heresy, and immorality often come from the influence of evil books, but “the reading of Sacred Letters,” as St. Ambrose says, “is the life of the soul; Christ Himself declares it when He says: ‘The words that I have spoken to you, are spirit and life’” (John 6:64).⁶⁴⁰

It was this reading that prepared St. Augustine to return to God when he heard the words: “Take and read.” A passage from St. Paul’s Epistle to the Romans⁶⁴¹ gave him the decisive light which tore him away from sin and led him to conversion.

St. Jerome relates in a letter to Eustochium how, at the time when he was beginning to lead the monastic life near Antioch, he was led by a very great grace to the assiduous reading of the Scriptures. The elegance of profane writers still pleased him greatly; by preference he read the works of Cicero, Virgil, and Plautus. Then he received the following grace: during sleep he beheld himself, as it were, transported before the tribunal of God, who asked him severely who he was. “I am a Christian,” Jerome replied. “You lie,” said the sovereign Judge. “You are a Ciceronian; for where your treasure is, there is your heart also.” And the order was given to scourge him. “Upon awakening,” writes St. Jerome, “I felt, indeed, that this had been more than a dream, that it was a reality, since I bore on my shoulders the marks of the stripes I had received. Since that time I have read the Sacred Scriptures with greater ardor than I formerly read profane books.” This experience explains St. Jerome’s statement to Eustochium in another letter: “Let sleep surprise you only reading; fall asleep only on Sacred Scripture.”

From what book can we better draw life than from Scripture, which has God for its Author? Especially the Gospels, the words of our Savior, the facts of His hidden, His apostolic, and His suffering life should be the living teaching to which the soul must ever turn. Christ knows how to make the loftiest and most divine things accessible to all by the simplicity with which He speaks. His word does not remain abstract and theoretical; it leads directly to true humility, to love of God and neighbor. Each word tells us that He seeks only the glory of Him who sent Him and the good of souls. The Sermon on the Mount in St. Matthew (chaps. 5–7) and the discourse after the Last Supper in St. John (chaps. 14–18) should be read frequently.

If with humility, hope, and love, we read the divine words of Scripture, which are spirit and life, they contain for us a special grace that daily inclines us more to imitate the virtues of Christ, His meekness, patience, and heroic love on the cross. Besides the Holy Eucharist, the true food of the saints is to be found in the Scriptures: the word of God, transmitted by His only Son, the Word made flesh. Hidden under the letter is the living thought of God, which, if we are docile, the gifts of understanding and wisdom will make us penetrate and taste more and more.

After the Gospel, nothing is more nourishing than the divinely inspired commentary on it, the Acts of the Apostles and the Epistles. They are the teachings of Christ lived by His first disciples, who were given the task of training us. These teachings are explained and adapted to the needs of the faithful. In the Acts is found the heroic life of the new-born Church, its diffusion in the midst of the greatest difficulties, constituting a lesson in confidence, valor, fidelity, and abandonment. Where, other than in the Epistles, can we find more profound and living pages about the person and work of Christ (Col. I), the splendor of the life of the Church and the immensity of Christ’s love for it (Eph. 1–3), about justification by faith in Christ (Rom. 1–11), about the eternal priesthood of Christ? (Heb., 1–9)

If the ethical part of the Epistles is considered, where can we read more pressing exhortations to charity, to the duties of our state, to perseverance, to heroic patience, to sanctity, and surer rules of conduct for all,—superiors, equals, inferiors—also for the weak, for the guilty, and for false teachers? Where can we find a more vivid exposition of the duties of all Christians in regard to the Church? (I Pet. 4 f.)

Every Christian should know certain parts of the Old Testament, in particular the Psalms, which are still the prayer of the Church in the Divine Office, that prayer of reparative adoration for the contrite and humbled sinner, of ardent supplication and thanksgiving. Interior souls ought to read also the most beautiful pages of the Prophets, which the liturgy of Advent and Lent

places before us, and in the Sapiential Books, the exhortations of uncreated Wisdom to the practice of the principal duties toward God and neighbor.

New lights and new strength will be found in the Scriptures, especially in the Gospels, when they are often reread with respect and love. God has put inexhaustible virtue in His word. When a person who has read a great deal and is tired of almost all books, approaches the close of life, he turns again to the Gospel as to the true prelude of the light which enlightens souls in eternal life.

THE SPIRITUAL WORKS OF THE SAINTS

Next to the Scriptures, the reading of the spiritual works of the saints greatly enlightens and warms the soul, because these works, though not composed under infallible inspiration, were written with the lights and the unction of the Holy Ghost. We should not ignore the chief spiritual works of St. Augustine,⁶⁴² St. Jerome,⁶⁴³ Cassian,⁶⁴⁴ St. Leo,⁶⁴⁵ St. Benedict,⁶⁴⁶ St. Gregory the Great,⁶⁴⁷ St. Basil,⁶⁴⁸ St. John Chrysostom⁶⁴⁹ Dionysius,⁶⁵⁰ St. Maximus Confessor,⁶⁵¹ St. Anselm,⁶⁵² and St. Bernard⁶⁵³ Very useful also is an acquaintance with what most concerns the interior life in the writings of Richard of St. Victor⁶⁵⁴ Hugh of St. Cher⁶⁵⁵ St. Albert the Great,⁶⁵⁶ St. Thomas Aquinas,⁶⁵⁷ St. Bonaventure.⁶⁵⁸ Profit may always be drawn from the *Dialogue* of St. Catherine of Siena,⁶⁵⁹ the works of Tauler,⁶⁶⁰ and those of Blessed Henry Suso,⁶⁶¹ Blessed Angela of Folign,⁶⁶² Blessed John Ruysbroeck,⁶⁶³ Thomas a Kempis, the probable author of *The Imitation*.

Among modern spiritual writers, one should read Louis Blossius, O.S.B.,⁶⁶⁴ the Franciscan, Francisco de Osuna⁶⁶⁵ (whose book served as a guide to St. Teresa), St. Ignatius Loyola,⁶⁶⁶ St. Teresa,⁶⁶⁷ St. John of the Cross,⁶⁶⁸ St. Francis de Sales,⁶⁶⁹ St. John Eudes.⁶⁷⁰

Finally, one should also read the spiritual writings of Bossuet,⁶⁷¹ those of the Dominicans, Louis of Granada,⁶⁷² Chardon,⁶⁷³ Piny,⁶⁷⁴ and Massoulie,⁶⁷⁵ those of the Jesuits, L. Dupont,⁶⁷⁶ Lallemand,⁶⁷⁷ Surin,⁶⁷⁸ De Caussade,⁶⁷⁹ and Grou,⁶⁸⁰ the works of the writers of the French school of the seventeenth century, Berulle,⁶⁸¹ Condren,⁶⁸² Bourgoing,⁶⁸³ St. Vincent de Paul,⁶⁸⁴ Olier,⁶⁸⁵ Venerable Boudon,⁶⁸⁶ those of Blessed Grignon de Montfort,⁶⁸⁷ and St. Alphonsus Liguori.⁶⁸⁸

We do not speak of more recent writers, whose principal works are known to all.

THE LIVES OF THE SAINTS

To the reading of books of spiritual doctrine should be joined that of the lives of the saints, which contain alluring examples that are always admirable and often imitable. Their deeds were often performed in most difficult circumstances by men and women with a nature like ours, who at the beginning had their weaknesses and defects, but in whom grace and charity gradually dominated nature by healing it, elevating it, and vivifying it. In them especially, we see the true meaning and import of the principle, that grace does not destroy nature (in so far as it is good), but perfects it. In them, especially at the end of the purgative and illuminative ways, we see what is in the unitive life the true harmony of nature and grace, the normal prelude of eternal beatitude.

In these lives we must seek especially what is imitable, and in what is extraordinary we must see a divine sign given to draw us from our lethargy and make us understand what is most profound and most lofty in an ordinary Christian life when the soul is truly docile to the Holy Ghost. The sufferings of the stigmatics thus recall to us what our Savior's passion should be for us and how we ought daily to say with more meaning at the end of the Stations of the Cross: "Sancta Mater, istud agas, Crucifixi fige plagas cordi meo valide." The extraordinary grace which enabled many saints, as St. Catherine of Siena, to drink deeply from the wound of the heart of Jesus should recall to us what a fervent Communion should be for us, and how each of our Communions should be substantially more fervent than the preceding one in our ascent toward God.

The examples of the saints, their humility, patience, confidence, overflowing charity, are more efficacious in making us practice virtue than abstract doctrine is. "Universals do not move."

We ought to read especially the lives of the saints written by saints, such as that of St. Francis of Assisi written by St. Bonaventure, that of St. Catherine of Siena by Blessed Raymond of Capua, her director, and the life of St. Teresa by herself.

DISPOSITIONS FOR PROFITABLE SPIRITUAL READING

A prayer well said before we begin to read will obtain for us the actual grace to read Sacred Scripture or spiritual books with a spirit of faith, avoiding all useless curiosity, intellectual vanity, the tendency to criticize what we read rather than to profit by it. The spirit of faith will make us seek God Himself in spiritual works.

We must also, with a sincere and keen desire for perfection, apply to ourselves what we read, instead of being content with a theoretical knowledge of it. Then, even while reading what has to do with "the little virtues," as St. Francis de Sales calls them, we shall reap great profit, for all the virtues are connected with the highest of all, charity. It is also well for advanced

souls to reread occasionally What is suitable for beginners; on second reading they will see this teaching under a superior light and will be astonished at all that is virtually contained in it, as, for example, in the first lines of the little catechism on the reason why we were created and placed in the world: “To know God, to love Him, to serve Him, and thus to obtain eternal life.”

It is also well for beginners to catch a glimpse of the extreme loftiness of Christian perfection, without, however, covering the ground too quickly and trying to go faster than grace. Perfection should at least be partly seen, because the end to be attained, which is last in the order of execution, is first in the order of intention or of desire. One must from the beginning wish to attain sanctity, since we are all called to that sanctity which would permit us to enter heaven immediately after death. No one, in fact, will go to purgatory except for sins which he might have avoided.

If beginners and the advanced have a keen desire to sanctify themselves, they will find what is suitable for them in Holy Scripture and in the spiritual writings of the saints. While reading, they will hear the teaching of the interior Master. That this may be so, they must read slowly and not devour books; they must be penetrated with what they read. Then spiritual reading will be transformed little by little into prayer, into intimate conversation with the interior Guest.⁶⁸⁹

It is also well after a few years to reread the very good books which have already done us much good. Life is short: we should be content to read and read again whatever bears the mark of God, and not to lose our time on things that are lifeless and of no value. St. Thomas Aquinas never wearied of rereading the conferences of Cassian. How many souls have gained greatly by often rereading *The Imitation* ! To be profoundly penetrated by one such book is far better than to read all spiritual writers superficially.

Moreover, as St. Bernard says, we should read with piety, seeking not only to know divine things, but to taste them.⁶⁹⁰ St. Matthew (24: 15) says: “He that readeth, let him understand.” Let us ask God for the light to understand clearly. The disciples of Emmaus did not understand the meaning of the prophecies until Christ opened their minds. This is why St. Bernard says to us: “Let prayer interrupt reading,” then truly this reading will be a spiritual food and will prepare the soul for prayer.

Finally, we must begin without delay to put into practice what we read. At the end of the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 7:24, 26), our Lord declared: “Everyone therefore that heareth these My words, and doth them, shall be likened to a wise man that built his house upon a rock.... And everyone that heareth these My words, and doth them not, shall be like the foolish man that built his house upon the sand.” “For not the hearers of the law,” says St. Paul, “are just before God; but the doers of the law shall be justified.”⁶⁹¹ Then reading bears fruit. In the parable of the sower we are told: “And other some fell upon good ground; and being sprung up, yielded fruit a hundredfold.... But that on the good ground, are they who in a good and perfect heart, hearing the word, keep it, and bring forth fruit in patience.”⁶⁹² According to this parable, some spiritual reading may produce thirtyfold, other sixtyfold, and still other a hundredfold. Such was, for example, the reading which Augustine did when he heard the words: “Take and read.” He opened the epistles of St. Paul, which were lying on the table, and read these words (Rom. I 3: 13 f.): “Let us walk honestly, as in the day: not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and impurities, not in contention and envy. But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ!’ From that moment his heart was changed; he retired for some time into solitude and asked for baptism. This was truly the hundredfold, which since then has nourished thousands of souls.

Spiritual Direction

Spiritual direction should be numbered among the exterior means of sanctification. We shall discuss its necessity in general and also in the different stages of the spiritual life, and then we shall recall the desired qualities of a director and the duties of the soul that is being directed.

THE NECESSITY OF DIRECTION

Though it is not an absolutely necessary means for the sanctification of, souls, direction is the normal means of spiritual progress. In constituting the Church, Christ willed that the faithful should be sanctified by submission to the pope and the bishops with respect to external jurisdiction, and in matters of conscience to confessors, who point out the means needed in order not to fall back into sin and to make progress in virtue.

Pope Leo XIII,⁶⁹³ following Cassian and St. Francis de Sales, recalls on this subject the fact that St. Paul himself received a guide from the Lord. When Paul was converted, Jesus did not at once reveal His designs to him, but sent him to Ananias at Damascus to learn what he should do.⁶⁹⁴

St. Basil says: "Employ all diligence and use the greatest circumspection in finding a man who may serve you as a very sure guide in the work of leading a holy life which you wish to undertake. Choose one who knows how to show souls of good will the straight road toward God."⁶⁹⁵ He says elsewhere: "To believe that one does not need counsel is great pride."⁶⁹⁶

St. Jerome writes to Rusticus: "Do not be your own master and do not set out upon a way that is entirely new for you without a guide; otherwise you will soon go astray." St. Augustine also says: "As a blind man cannot follow the good road without a leader, no one can walk without a guide."⁶⁹⁷ No one is a good judge in his own cause by reason of secret pride which may make him deviate from the right path.

In his conferences, Cassian says that anyone who relies on his own judgment will never reach perfection and will not be able to avoid the snares of the devil.⁶⁹⁸ He concludes that the best means to triumph over the most dangerous temptations is to make them known to a wise counselor who has the grace of state to enlighten us.⁶⁹⁹ In reality, to manifest them to one who has a right to hear them often suffices to make them disappear.

St. Bernard says that novices in the religious life should be lead by a father director who instructs, directs, consoles, and encourages them.⁷⁰⁰ In one of his letters he goes so far as to say: "He who constitutes himself his own director, becomes the disciple of a fool" And he adds: "As far as I am concerned, I declare that it is easier and safer for me to command many others than myself alone."⁷⁰¹ Our self-love leads us less astray, in truth, in conducting others than in dealing with ourselves, and if we knew well how to apply to ourselves what we tell others, we would make far greater progress.

In the fourteenth century, St. Vincent Ferrer expressed the same thought in his *De vita spirituali* (Part II, chap. I). "Our Lord," he says, "without whom we can do nothing, will never grant His grace to one who, having at his disposition a man capable of instructing and directing him, neglects this powerful means of sanctification, believing that he is sufficient to himself and that he can by his own powers seek and find the things useful to salvation.... A person having a director whom he obeys completely and unreservedly will reach his goal much more easily and rapidly than he could alone, even with the aid of a very keen intellect and learned books on spiritual matters.... In general, all who have reached perfection, have followed this road of obedience, unless, by a privilege and singular grace, God Himself instructed some souls that had no one to direct them."

St. Teresa,⁷⁰² St. John of the Cross,⁷⁰³ and St. Francis de Sales⁷⁰⁴ teach the same doctrine. St. Francis de Sales says that we cannot judge our own cause impartially by reason of a complacency that is "so secret and imperceptible as not to be discovered even by those who are tainted therewith."⁷⁰⁵ Likewise a person who has been in a closed room for a long time does not notice that the air has become vitiated, whereas one who comes in from outside notices it immediately.

We understand quite well that we need a guide if we intend to climb a mountain. He is not less necessary for climbing to the summit of spiritual perfection, the more so as in this ascent we must avoid the snares laid by Satan, who wishes to prevent us from ascending.

St. Alphonsus, in his excellent book, *Praxis confessarii* (nos. 121–71), indicates the principal object of direction: mortification, the manner of receiving the sacraments, prayer, the practice of virtues, the sanctification of ordinary actions.

The testimony of all these authorities shows clearly the general need of direction. We shall obtain a clearer idea of this necessity by considering the three stages of the interior life, or the spiritual needs of beginners, of proficients, and of the

perfect.

THE DIRECTION OF BEGINNERS

Beginners need wise, firm, and paternal direction for their formation. In religious orders, this direction is the special duty of masters and mistresses of novices.

Later its necessity is felt less, except at difficult periods when some change takes place, or again when an important decision must be made.

Beginners must evidently be forewarned against relapses and also against two contradictory defects. Some, who receive sensible consolations in prayer, confound them with graces of a higher order and presumptuously wish to cover the ground rapidly, and without delay to reach the life of union without passing through the indispensable degrees.⁷⁰⁶ They must be reminded of the necessity of humility and be told that progress toward perfection is the work of a lifetime. No one can fly before he has wings, and no one begins the construction of a church with the spires, but with the foundation.⁷⁰⁷ If the end to be obtained is first in the order of intention or of desire, it is, in reality, last in achievement, and the most modest means indispensable for reaching it must not be neglected.

Other beginners take a secret pride in austerity, as the Jansenists did, and practice such excessive exterior mortifications that they compromise their health. Then, in their efforts to take care of themselves, they fall into laxity and go from one extreme to the other. They need to learn the measure of Christian discretion and must understand that it is not sufficient to have, over and above a keen sensibility, the three theological virtues, but that it is necessary also to have between these two domains the moral virtues of prudence, justice, fortitude, and temperance, so that sensibility may gradually become disciplined and these superficial and passing impulses may not be confounded with the lofty aspirations of living faith, hope, and charity.

Direction is particularly necessary in this period of prolonged aridity, in which meditation becomes difficult, and quite severe temptations against chastity and patience also arise, accompanied at times by contradictions from without. According to St. John of the Cross,⁷⁰⁸ this trial marks the passage from the purgative way of beginners to the illuminative way of proficients, but on condition that the three signs, which a good director can discern, are found in it. These three signs, which we shall speak of farther on, are the following: (1) When we find no comfort in the things of God, and also none in created things. (2) When the memory dwells ordinarily on God with a keen desire for perfection and the fear of not serving God. (3) When meditation is not possible and one feels inclined to a simple gaze on God. At the time of this crisis, which should be in the nature of a second conversion, it is well to pay close attention to a good director in order to traverse this difficult period generously and not to become a retarded soul. Farther on we shall discuss this subject at greater length.⁷⁰⁹

THE DIRECTION OF PROFICIENTS AND THE PERFECT

The necessity of a guide for certain periods of the spiritual life of the advanced confirms what we have just said about its necessity for beginners. We may with profit state this confirmation here.

Direction may customarily be given more rapidly to proficients because the proficient has a greater knowledge of the spiritual life and can briefly explain the point on which he needs counsel. The director then becomes the witness of the soul's life and progress; he should be the instrument of the Holy Ghost in order to make sure that the soul is docile to His inspirations. To do this, the director should seek to know well the action of the interior Master in given souls that he may discern in each, as far as is possible, the good and the bad, the dominant defect to be combated and the special attraction of grace to be followed.

Recourse should be had to the director especially during the annual retreat in order to discuss with him in all frankness what constitutes the basis of the life of the soul, and to make sure of not falling into the defects of the advanced—hidden pride and presumption—which may become the source of great illusions.⁷¹⁰

The proficient also experiences periods in which he particularly needs a good guide; especially is this the case when he has to pass through the trials which mark the entrance into the unitive way, and which St. John calls the passive purification of the spirit. This purification appears under various forms that are more or less accentuated. Generally it is a prolonged privation of sensible and also spiritual consolations. During this period strong temptations often arise against faith, hope, and fraternal charity, and even against the love of God. Evidently if a person is to pass through this difficult period, the help of a good director is highly desirable in order not to fall back at this time but rather to make progress. And he who can direct others during such a trial, would not be able to direct himself, for here there is no longer "any road traced out in advance," as St. John of the Cross⁷¹¹ says; one must follow the inspiration of the Holy Ghost and not confuse it with something that might resemble it. At this time, souls given to prayer have a more special need of an enlightened and experienced director. St. Teresa felt the need of opening her soul completely to learned men, versed in the things of the interior life, to make certain of her docility to the Holy Ghost.⁷¹² The perfect themselves feel the need of this help to discover the harmony between passivity under the divine action and the activity which the Lord asks of them in order faithfully to practice the maxim: "fidelity and abandonment." They

feel the need of direction that they may with profound humility keep alive in their hearts the love of the cross.

We have here only touched on the direction of proficients in order to indicate that, if it is necessary for them, with far greater reason is it necessary for beginners.⁷¹³

THE QUALITIES OF THE DIRECTOR AND THE DUTIES OF THE ONE BEING DIRECTED

St. Francis de Sales says on the subject of a director: "He must be a man of charity, learning, and prudence; if anyone of these three qualities be wanting in him, there is danger."⁷¹⁴ St. Teresa expresses the same opinion.⁷¹⁵

His charity ought to be disinterested and to incline him, not to draw hearts to himself but to lead them to God. On this point, Tauler is exacting and says that certain directors who draw souls to themselves are like hunting dogs that eat the hare instead of bringing it back to their master. Whereupon the hunter whips them soundly. The director's charitable kindness should not be weakness; it should be firm and fearless in speaking the truth in order to lead souls effectively to goodness. Neither should he lose his time in useless conversations or letters, but go straight to the point for the good of the soul.

In addition, he should have a knowledge of the spiritual life, be penetrated with the teachings of the great masters of the interior life, and be a good psychologist.⁷¹⁶

That the director may be the instrument of the Holy Ghost, he ought prudently to discern in souls the dominant defect to be avoided and the supernatural attraction to be followed. For this purpose, he must pray for light, especially in difficult cases, and, if he is humble, he will receive the graces of state. He will see that he must stimulate some and moderate the ardor of others, teaching the latter not to confound sentimentality with love, which proves itself by works.

When he directs generous souls, his prudence must avoid two dangers: that of wishing to lead all pious souls indiscriminately and rapidly to give themselves to contemplative prayer, and that of imagining that it is useless to concern oneself with this question. Here a person must advance neither too slowly nor too rapidly, but must examine whether there exist in the soul the three signs which we have pointed out, following the teaching of St. John of the Cross and several other great masters, in order to pass from discursive meditation to contemplation. Before these appear, it is well and sufficient to remind souls that they must be docile to the inspirations of the interior Master, as they are manifestly conformable to their vocation.

The duties of the directed soul spring obviously from what we have just said; the person who is being directed ought to respect his director as the representative of God, and to avoid two extremes opposed to respect for a director: sharp criticisms and excessive familiarity. This respect should be accompanied by a simple yet entirely spiritual filial affection, which excludes petty jealousy and the desire to be specially loved.⁷¹⁷

The person who is being directed should also have filial confidence in his director and great openness of heart towards him. As St. Francis de Sales so well explains it: "Open your heart to him with all sincerity and fidelity, manifesting clearly and explicitly the state of your conscience without fiction or dissimulation."⁷¹⁸

Lastly, he must be very docile in following the counsel given; otherwise he would be following his own will rather than that of God. It is not forbidden to explain that there is serious difficulty in putting such or such advice into practice; but after such explanation, he must subordinate his judgment to that of the director. Strictly speaking, the director may be mistaken; but the person under his direction will not be mistaken in obeying him, unless he advises something contrary to faith and morals. In that event a change of director is imperative.

Not without grave reason, however, should anyone change his director or confessor. The change should certainly not be made because of inconstancy, pride, false shame, or curiosity. But this may be done if a person perceives that his director's views are too natural and that his affection is excessively sensible, and that he has not the requisite learning, prudence, and discretion.

Except in these cases, a person should keep as far as possible a certain continuity in direction that there may truly be continuity in it and perseverance on the right road. We should not give up a good guide because he reproves us for our good. It may be well to recall what St. Louis used to say to his son: "Go to confession frequently; choose virtuous and learned confessors who know how to instruct you in what you ought to do or avoid, and give your confessors leave to reprove and admonish you freely." Such a statement gives evidence of good, holy, and strong affection without any admixture of sentimentality, which is an affectation of sentiment.

Under these conditions, the director will be able to be the instrument of the Holy Ghost to control His action in us, and to make us ever more docile to divine inspirations. Thus we will truly advance along the narrow way, which becomes broader and broader as we draw near to the infinite goodness of God to which it leads.

PART 2

The Purification of the Soul in Beginners

We have spoken of the principles of the interior life, that is, of its sources and its end, which is Christian perfection; we must now treat in particular of each of the three ages of the spiritual life, and first of all of the purification of the soul in beginners.

We shall see, in this regard, what characterizes this age of the interior life, and shall speak at some length of the active purification of the sensitive part and of the intellectual part of the soul, of the use of the sacraments, of the prayer of beginners, and lastly of the more or less well-borne passive purification of the senses which marks the transition to the age of proficients, or the entrance into the illuminative way. In this connection, we shall have to speak of the abuse of graces. Beginners who have become retarded and tepid souls, are the ones that do not reach the higher spiritual age. This part of spirituality is very significant from a practical point of view, for many souls remain greatly retarded because they have not put it into practice, whereas those that really profit by it make great progress.

At this stage it is not important to read many books, to have many ideas, but it is important to become penetrated with the fundamental principles set forth in some substantial book and to put them generously into practice without turning back. Our Lord Himself stated this expressly at the end of the Sermon on the Mount: “Everyone therefore that heareth these My words, and doth them, shall be likened to a wise man that built his house upon a rock.... And everyone that heareth these My words, and doth them not, shall be like a foolish man that built his house upon the sand. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew; and they beat upon that house. And it fell, and great was the fall thereof.”⁷¹⁹

When anyone reads the lives of beatified and canonized servants of God, in particular of several of those who in recent times have been proposed to us as models, he is impressed with the fact that many did not have great culture and had not read many books, but that they were profoundly penetrated with the Gospel, and had thus received its spirit, and that they practiced it with admirable generosity, at times in a very simple form of life which recalls that of St. Joseph. They thus attained a lofty wisdom, which at times showed forth in the profound realism of their reflections, and in an ardent charity that was most fruitful for the salvation of souls.

The Spiritual Age of Beginners

We have seen that St. Thomas, when speaking of the three ages of the spiritual life, remarks that “at first it is incumbent on man to occupy himself chiefly with avoiding sin and resisting his concupiscences, which move him in opposition to charity.”⁷²⁰

The Christian in the state of grace, who begins to give himself to the service of God and to tend toward the perfection of charity according to the demands of the supreme precept, has a mentality or state of soul which can be described by observing particularly knowledge of self and of God, love of self and of God.

SELF-KNOWLEDGE AND KNOWLEDGE OF GOD

Beginners have an initial knowledge of themselves; little by little they discern the defects they have, the remains of sins that have already been forgiven, and new failings that are more or less deliberate and voluntary. If these beginners are generous, they seek, not to excuse themselves, but to correct themselves, and the Lord shows them their wretchedness and poverty, making them understand, however, that they must consider it only in the light of divine mercy, which exhorts them to advance. They must daily examine their consciences and learn to overcome themselves that they may not follow the unconsidered impulse of their passions.

However, they know themselves as yet only in a superficial way. They have not discovered what a treasure baptism placed in their souls, and they are ignorant of all the self-love and the often unconscious egoism still continuing in them and revealing itself from time to time under a sharp vexation or reproach. Often they have a clearer perception of this self-love in others than in themselves; they ought to remember Christ’s words: “Why seest thou the mote that is in thy brother’s eye; and seest not the beam that is in thy own eye?”⁷²¹ The beginner bears in himself a diamond embedded in a mass of gross material, and he does not yet know the value of the diamond or all the defects of the other material. God loves him far more than he believes, but with a strong love that has its exigencies and that demands abnegation if the soul is to reach true liberty of spirit.

The beginner rises gradually to a certain knowledge of God which is still very dependent on sensible things. He knows God in the mirror of the natural world or in that of the parables: for example, in those of the prodigal son, of the lost sheep, of the good shepherd. This is the straight movement of elevation toward God, taking its point of departure from a simple, sensible fact. It is not yet the spiral movement rising toward God by the consideration of the various mysteries of salvation, nor is it the circular movement of contemplation that ever returns to the radiating divine goodness, as the eagle likes to look at the sun while describing the same circle several times in the air.⁷²²

The beginner is not yet familiar with the mysteries of salvation, with those of the redeeming Incarnation, of the life of the Church. He cannot yet feel habitually inclined to see therein the radiation of the divine goodness. However, he sometimes has this view while considering our Savior’s passion, but he does not yet penetrate the depths of the mystery of the redemption. His view of the things of God is still superficial; he has not reached maturity of spirit.

THE LOVE OF GOD IN ITS EARLY STAGES

In this state there is a proportionate love of God. Truly generous beginners love the Lord with a holy fear of sin which makes them flee mortal sin, and even deliberate venial sins, by the mortification of the senses and of the inordinate passions, or of the threefold concupiscence of the flesh, the eyes, and pride. This sign indicates that they have the beginning of a deep, voluntary love.

Nevertheless, a number practically neglect necessary mortification, and resemble a man who would like to begin climbing a mountain, not from the base of the mountain but halfway up the side. When they do this, they ascend in their imagination only, not in reality; they travel rapidly, and their first enthusiasm will die out as quickly as burning straw. They will believe that they have a knowledge of spiritual things and will abandon them after having barely examined them superficially. This is, alas, frequently the case.

If, on the contrary, the beginner is generous and seriously wishes to advance, though not wishing to go more quickly than grace or to practice beyond the bounds of obedience an excessive mortification inspired by secret pride, it is not unusual for him to receive as recompense sensible consolations in prayer or in the study of divine things. The Lord thus conquers his sensibility, since he still lives chiefly by it. Sensible grace, so called because it reacts on the sensibility, turns it from dangerous things and draws it toward our Lord and His holy Mother. At these times, the generous beginner already loves God

with his whole heart, but not yet with his whole soul, with all his strength, or with all his mind. Spiritual writers often speak of this “milk of consolation” which is then given. St. Paul himself says: “And I, brethren, could not speak to you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, as unto little ones in Christ. I gave you milk to drink, not meat; for you are not able as yet.”⁷²³

Then what generally happens? Almost all beginners, on receiving these sensible consolations, take too much complacency in them, as if they were an end, not a means. They then fall into a certain spiritual gluttony accompanied by rash haste and curiosity in the study of divine things, by unconscious pride that makes them wish to talk about these things as if they were already masters of the subject. Then, says St. John of the Cross,⁷²⁴ the seven capital sins reappear, no longer under their gross form but as they apply to spiritual things.⁷²⁵ They are so many obstacles to true and solid piety.

What follows from this? According to the logic of the spiritual life, it follows that a second conversion is necessary, that described by St. John of the Cross under the name of the passive purification of the senses “common to the greater number of beginners”⁷²⁶ in order to introduce them into “the illuminative way of proficients, where God nourishes the soul by infused contemplation.”⁷²⁷

This purification is manifested by a prolonged sensible aridity in which the beginner is stripped of the sensible consolations wherein he delighted too greatly. If in this aridity there is a keen desire for God, for His reign in us, and the fear of offending Him, it is a sign that a divine purification is taking place. And this is clearer still if to this keen desire for God is added difficulty in prayer, in making multiple and reasoned considerations, and the inclination to look simply at God.⁷²⁸ This inclination is the third sign, which indicates that the second conversion is taking place and that the soul is raised toward a higher form of life, which is that of the illuminative way of proficients.

If the soul bears this purification well, its sensibility submits more and more to the spirit. Often it must then generously repulse temptations against chastity and patience, virtues that have their seat in the sensitive appetites and that are strengthened by this struggle.

In this crisis the Lord tills the soul, so to speak; He greatly deepens the furrow He traced at the moment of justification or the first conversion. He extirpates the evil roots or remains of sin. He shows the vanity of the things of the world, of the quest for honors and dignities. Gradually a new life begins, as in the natural order when the child becomes an adolescent.

This crisis is, however, more or less well borne; many persons are not generous enough and may become retarded souls. Others follow divine inspiration with docility and become proficients.

Such are the chief distinctive marks of the spiritual age of beginners: a knowledge of self still superficial; an initial knowledge of God as yet very dependent on sensible things; a love of God manifesting itself by the struggle to flee sin. If this struggle is generous, it is as a rule rewarded by sensible consolations, on which one too often dwells. Then the Lord takes them away and by this spoliation introduces one into a spiritual life that is more detached from the senses. It is easy to see the logical and vital sequence of the phases through which the soul must pass. It is not a mechanical juxtaposition of successive states, but the organic development of the interior life which thus becomes more and more an intimate conversation of the soul, no longer only with itself but with God.

THE GENEROSITY REQUIRED IN BEGINNERS

Of great importance to note here is the generosity necessary in the beginner from the very first moment if he is to reach intimate union with God and the penetrating and sweet contemplation of divine things.

On this subject we read in *The Dialogue* of St. Catherine of Siena: “You were all invited, generally and in particular, by My Truth, when He cried in the Temple, saying: ‘Whosoever thirsteth, let him come to Me and drink, for I am the fountain of the water of life.’... So that you are invited to the fountain of living water of grace, and it is right for you, with perseverance, to keep by Him who is made for you a bridge, not being turned back by any contrary wind that may arise, either of prosperity or adversity, and to persevere till you find Me, who am the giver of the water of life, by means of this sweet and loving Word, My only-begotten Son.”⁷²⁹

St. Thomas speaks likewise when he comments on the words: “Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after justice: for they shall have their fill” “The Lord,” he says, “wishes us to thirst after that justice which consists in rendering to every man and to God first of all what is His due. He wishes us never to be satiated on earth... but rather that our desire should grow always.... Blessed are they that have this insatiable desire; they will receive eternal life and here below an abundance of spiritual goods in the accomplishment of the precepts, according to the words of the Master:⁷³⁰ ‘My meat is to do the will of Him that sent Me, that I may perfect His work.’”⁷³¹

The Angelic Doctor says again in his commentary on St. John, 7: 37 “All that thirst are invited when our Lord says: ‘If any man thirst, let him come to Me and drink.’ Isaias had said: ‘All you that thirst, come to the (living) waters.’”⁷³² He calls those who thirst, for it is they who desire to serve God. God does not accept a forced service, but He ‘loveth a cheerful giver.’⁷³³ He calls not only some, but all who thirst; and He invites them to drink this spiritual beverage which is divine wisdom, capable of

satiating our desires. And once we have found this divine wisdom, we shall wish to give it to others.⁷³⁴ This is why He says to us: ‘He that believeth in Me, as the Scripture saith: Out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water.’”⁷³⁵

To reach this overflowing spring, one must thirst for virtue and walk generously along the narrow way of abnegation, in the spiritual way which is narrow for the senses, but which, for the spirit, becomes immense like God Himself to whom it leads. The road to perdition, on the other hand, while broad at first for the senses, in turn becomes narrower and narrower for the spirit and leads to hell.⁷³⁶

St. Teresa, recalling these same words of the Master: “If any man thirst, let him come to Me, and drink,” likewise writes: “Remember, our Lord invited ‘any man’: He is truth itself; His word cannot be doubted. If all had not been included, He would not have addressed everybody, nor would He have said: ‘Let all men come, for they will lose nothing by it, and I will give to drink to those I think fit for it.’ But as He said unconditionally: ‘If any man thirst, let him come to Me,’ I feel sure that, unless they stop halfway, none will fail to drink of this living water. May our Lord, who has promised to grant it us, give us grace to seek it as we ought, for His own sake.”⁷³⁷ In the same chapter the saint says: “When God gives you this water, sisters, this comparison will please you, and you will understand, as those do who drink of it, how genuine love of God that is powerful and freed from earthly dross rises above mortal things and is sovereign over all the elements of this world.... Our souls are so dear to Him that He prevents their running into danger while He is bestowing this grace on them. He at once calls them to His side, and in a single instant shows them more truths and gives them a clearer knowledge of the nothingness of all things than we could gain for ourselves in many years.” In chapter 21, the saint adds: “Let us return to speak of those who wish to travel by this path to the very end, and to the fount itself, where they will drink of the water of life. Although there are books written on the subject, yet I do not think it will be waste of time to speak of it here. How must one begin? I maintain that this is the chief point; in fact, that everything depends on people having a great and a most resolute determination never to halt until they reach their journey’s end, happen what may, whatever the consequences are, cost what it will, let who will blame them, whether they reach the goal or die on the road, or lose heart to bear the trials they encounter, or the earth itself goes to pieces beneath their feet.”

St. John of the Cross expresses himself in like manner in the prologue of *The Ascent of Mount Carmel* and in *The Living Flame of Love*.⁷³⁸

The generosity of which all these great saints speak in the quotations given is none other than the virtue of magnanimity; but it is no longer only that described by Aristotle; it is infused Christian magnanimity described by St. Thomas in *Ila Ilae*, q. 129 of the *Summa*.

The magnanimous man, says the saint, seeks great things worthy of honor, but he considers that honors themselves are practically nothing.⁷³⁹ He does not let himself be exalted by prosperity or cast down by difficulties. Is there anything greater on earth than genuine Christian perfection? The magnanimous man dreads neither obstacles nor critics nor scorn, if they must be borne for a great cause. He does not allow himself to be at all intimidated by freethinkers, and pays no attention to their utterances. He pays far more attention to truth than to the opinions of men which are often false. If this generosity is not always understood by those who wish an easier life, it has, nevertheless, a true value in itself. And if it is united to humility, it pleases God and cannot fail of a reward.

St. Francis de Sales, in his Fifth Conference, speaks admirably of generosity in its relations with humility, which ought always to accompany it. He says:

Humility believes it can do nothing, considering the knowledge of our poverty and weakness...; and, on the contrary, generosity makes us say with St. Paul: “I can do all things in Him who strengtheneth me.” Humility makes us distrust ourselves, and generosity makes us trust in God.... There are people who amuse themselves with a false and silly humility, which hinders them from seeing in themselves the good that God has given them. They are very wrong in this; for the goods that God has placed in us should be recognized... that we may glorify the divine goodness which bestowed them on us.... Humility which does not produce generosity is indubitably false.... Generosity relies on trust in God and courageously undertakes to do all that is commanded... no matter how difficult it may be.... What can hinder me from succeeding, it says, since the Scriptures declare that “He, who hath begun a good work in you, will perfect it unto the day of Christ Jesus”?⁷⁴⁰

Such ought to be the generosity of beginners. All the saints hold the same doctrine. Christ Himself declared: “No man putting his hand to the plow and looking back is fit for the kingdom of God.”⁷⁴¹ One must belong to those of whom He said: “Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after justice: for they shall have their fill”; here on earth they will taste, as it were, the prelude of eternal life and by working for the salvation of others will inspire in them a holy desire for this life.

Practical Naturalism and Mortification According to the Gospel

We have given a general idea of the spiritual age of beginners; now we shall speak of the principal work imposed on them that they may avoid falling back into sin. With this end in view, we must get a just idea of the disorder that sin, under its multiple forms, really is and also of its roots and consequences which may continue to exist in us for a long time.

First of all, we must note here two extreme and erroneous tendencies: on the one hand, the frequent, practical naturalism into which the quietists fell; on the other hand, the proud Jansenist austerity that does not spring from the love of God. Truth rises like a summit between these two extremes, which represent the opposing deviations of error.

PRACTICAL NATURALISM: OF ACTION AND OF INACTION

Practical naturalism, which is the negation of the spirit of faith in the conduct of life, tends to revive under more or less accentuated forms, as it did some years ago in Americanism and Modernism. In several works that appeared during that period, mortification and the vows of religion were disparaged; they were considered not a deliverance which favors the upward flight of the interior life, but a hindrance to the apostolate. We were asked: Why speak so much of mortification, if Christianity is a doctrine of life; of renunciation, if Christianity ought to assimilate all human activity instead of destroying it; of obedience, if Christianity is a doctrine of liberty? These passive virtues, they said, have such importance only for negative spirits that are incapable of undertaking anything and that possess only the force of inertia.

Why, they added, depreciate our natural activity? Is our nature not good, does it not come from God, is it not inclined to love Him above all else? Our passions themselves, the movements of our sensible appetites (desire or aversion, joy or sadness) are neither good nor bad; they become so according to the intention of our will. They are forces to be utilized; they must not be mortified but regulated and modulated. They said that such is the teaching of St. Thomas, very different from that of so many spiritual writers, quite different, too, from Book III, chap. 54, of *The Imitation* on “The Different Motions of Nature and Grace.” In thus opposing the author of *The Imitation*, they forget the words of our Savior: “Unless the grain of wheat falling into the ground die, itself remaineth alone. But if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit. He that loveth his life shall lose it; and he that hateth his life in this world, keepeth it unto life eternal”⁷⁴²

They asked, moreover, why one should so greatly combat private judgment, self-will. To do so is to place oneself in a state of servitude which destroys all initiative and makes a person lose contact with the world, which one ought not to scorn, but to ameliorate. Holding this opinion, would one not lose sight of what all true spiritual men have meant by “self-will,” or a will not conformed to the will of God?

In this objection formulated by Americanism and taken up again by Modernism,⁷⁴³ the true is cleverly mingled with the false. Even the authority of St. Thomas is invoked, and the following principle of the great doctor is often repeated: “Grace does not destroy nature, but perfects it.” The movements of nature are not as inordinate, they say, as the author of *The Imitation* maintains; we must have the full development of nature under grace.

And as they lack the true spirit of faith, they designedly pervert the principle of St. Thomas which they invoke. He speaks of nature as such, in the philosophical sense of the word, of nature with its essential and also its good elements; of the work of God, and not of wounded, fallen nature, as it actually is in consequence of original sin and of our personal sins, more or less deformed by an often unconscious egoism, our covetousness, our pride. Likewise, St. Thomas speaks of the passions or emotions as such, and not as inordinate, when he says that they are forces to be utilized; but to utilize them one must mortify whatever is inordinate in them. Their inordinateness must not simply be veiled or moderated, but put to death.

All these equivocations were not long in manifesting their consequences. The tree is judged by its fruit. With too strong a desire to please the world, these Modernists, apostles of a new type, let themselves be converted by the world, instead of converting it.

They disregarded the consequences of original sin; to hear them, one would judge that man was born good, as the Pelagians, and later Jean Jacques Rousseau, declared. They forgot the gravity of mortal sin as an offense against God; and they considered it merely an evil which harms man. Therefore they failed particularly to recognize the gravity of the intellectual sins: incredulity, presumption, pride. The most serious offense seemed to them to be abstention from social works; consequently the purely contemplative life was considered quite useless, or the lot of the incapable. God Himself willed to reply to this objection by the canonization of St. Theresa of the Child Jesus and by the extraordinary radiation of that contemplative soul.

They also failed to recognize the infinite elevation of our supernatural end: God, the Author of grace. Instead of speaking of eternal life, of the beatific vision, they talked about a vague moral ideal tinted with religion, in which the radical opposition between heaven and hell disappeared. Finally, they forgot that the great means taken by Christ to save the world was the cross.

By all its consequences, the new doctrine gave proof of its principle: practical naturalism, not the spirit of God but the spirit of nature, the negation of the supernatural, if not in theory, at least in the conduct of life. During the period of Modernism this negation was occasionally formulated by declaring that mortification does not belong to the essence of Christianity. But we reply: Is mortification anything else than penance, and is not penance necessary for the Christian? How could St. Paul have written: "Always bearing about in our body the mortification of Jesus, that the life also of Jesus may be made manifest in our bodies"?⁷⁴⁴

Under another form, practical naturalism appeared among the quietists, especially at the time of Molinos, in the seventeenth century. This naturalism was not that of action, as it is in Americanism, but that of inaction. Molinos held that "to wish to act offends God, who wishes to be the only one to act in us."⁷⁴⁵ By no longer acting, he said, the soul annihilates itself and returns to its principle; then God alone lives and reigns in it.⁷⁴⁶ Practical naturalism is thus reached by a way contrary to that of Americanism, which exalts natural activity.

Molinos deduced from his principle that the soul should no longer produce acts of knowledge or of love of God,⁷⁴⁷ nor should it think any more of heaven or of hell, nor any longer reflect on its acts or on its defects;⁷⁴⁸ the examination of conscience was thus suppressed. Molinos added that the soul should no longer desire its own perfection or its salvation,⁷⁴⁹ nor should it ask God for anything positive,⁷⁵⁰ but it ought to abandon itself to Him so that He may work His divine will in it, without its cooperation. Finally, he said: "The soul no longer needs to offer positive resistance to temptations, of which it no longer has to take account;⁷⁵¹ the voluntary cross of mortification is a heavy and useless burden which one must get rid of."⁷⁵²

He recommended that in prayer one should remain in obscure faith, in a repose in which one forgets every distinct thought relating to the humanity of Christ, or even to the divine perfections or to the Blessed Trinity, and that one should remain in this repose without producing any act. "That," he said, "is acquired contemplation, in which one must remain all one's life if God does not raise the soul to infused contemplation."⁷⁵³

In reality the contemplation thus acquired by the cessation of every act was only a pious somnolence, far more somnolent than pious. Certain quietists did not deign to leave it even to kneel at the elevation during Mass. They remained seated in their would-be union with God, which they confounded with an august form of nothingness. Their state reminds one more of the nirvana of the Buddhists than of the transforming and radiant union of the saints.

This shows that the acquired contemplation, which Molinos advised for all, was not an infused passivity, but one acquired at will by the cessation of every operation. He thus attributed to this would-be acquired contemplation what is true only of infused contemplation, and with one stroke of the pen he suppressed all asceticism and the practice of the virtues, considered by tradition as the true disposition for infused contemplation and intimate union with God. Moreover, he claimed that "the distinction between the three ways, purgative, illuminative, and unitive, is the greatest absurdity that has been expressed in mysticism, since," he says, "there is only one way for all, the interior way."⁷⁵⁴

This suppression of mortification led to the worst disorders. Molinos finally reached the point of declaring that the temptations of the devil are always useful, even when they lead to immodest acts; that it is not necessary then to make acts of the contrary virtues, but that one must resign oneself, for such weakness reveals our nothingness.⁷⁵⁵ But Molinos, instead of thus reaching contempt of self by the recognition of our culpability, claimed to reach impeccability⁷⁵⁶ and mystical death; strange impeccability, reconcilable with all disorders.⁷⁵⁷

This lamentable doctrine is, of course, a caricature of traditional mysticism, which is thus radically perverted in all its principles. And under the pretext of avoiding natural activity, which naturalism of action exalts, one falls here into the practical naturalism of sloth and inaction. Under another form, this doctrine amounted to the suppression of asceticism, of the exercise of the virtues, and of mortification.⁷⁵⁸

The errors of the quietists show that there are two types of naturalism: the practical naturalism of those who have lost the interior life, and the quite different naturalism of those who have never found it.

At the opposite extreme from practical naturalism, there is occasionally the proud austerity of a false supernaturalism, such as we find in Jansenism and, earlier, in different forms of fanaticism, such as that of the Montanists in the second century and of the flagellants in the twelfth century. All these sects lost sight of the spirit of Christian mortification, which is not a spirit of pride, but of love of God.

In the seventeenth century the Jansenists fell into a pessimism which is an alteration of the Christian doctrine of penance. Like the first Protestants, they exaggerated the results of original sin to the point of saying that man no longer has free will, the liberty of indifference, but only spontaneity, and that all the acts of infidels are sins.⁷⁵⁹ They taught that "all his life long, a man must do penance for original sin."⁷⁶⁰ As a result, they retained souls during a whole lifetime in the purgative way, and kept

them away from Holy Communion, saying that we are not worthy of such a union with our Lord. According to their doctrine, only those should be admitted to Holy Communion who have a pure, unalloyed love of God.⁷⁶¹ They forgot that this very pure love of God is precisely the effect of Communion, when it is accompanied by a generous struggle against all that is inordinate in us. Jansenism never attained to deliverance and peace.⁷⁶²

Here as elsewhere, two opposing errors must be avoided: practical naturalism and proud austerity. The truth is to be found between these two extremes and above them as a summit. We can see it if we consider, on the one hand, the elevation of our last end and of charity, and, on the other hand, the gravity of mortal sin and of its consequences.

MORTIFICATION ACCORDING TO THE GOSPEL

To see the true spirit of Christian mortification, we must consider what our Lord says about it in the Gospel and how the saints understood it and lived it.

The Savior did not come upon earth to carry out a human work of philanthropy, but a divine work of charity. He accomplished it by speaking more to men of their duties than of their rights, by telling them the necessity of dying completely to sin in order to receive an abundant new life, and He willed to show His love for them even to the point of dying on the cross to redeem them. The two aspects of death to sin and of higher life are always spoken of together, with a dominant note which is that of the love of God. Nothing like this appears in the errors mentioned above.

What does our Lord tell us about mortification? In St. Luke's Gospel we read: "He said to all: If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me. For whosoever will save his life,⁷⁶³ shall lose it; for he that shall lose his life for My sake, shall save it.⁷⁶⁴ For what is a man advantaged if he gain the whole world and lose himself and cast away himself?"⁷⁶⁵

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus points out the necessity of mortification, that is, of the death to sin and its consequences, by insisting on the elevation of our supernatural end: "Unless your justice abound more than that of the scribes and Pharisees, you shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven."⁷⁶⁶ "Be you therefore perfect, as also your heavenly Father is perfect."⁷⁶⁷ Why? Because Christ brings us grace, which is a participation in the inner life of God, superior to the natural life of the angels, that He may lead us to union with God, since we are called to see God as He sees Himself and to love Him as He loves Himself. This is the meaning of the words: "Be you therefore perfect, as also your heavenly Father is perfect." But this precept requires the mortification of all that is inordinate in us, of the inordinate movements of concupiscence, anger, hatred, pride, hypocrisy, and so on. These movements represent what is inordinate in the different passions. Our Lord is explicit on this point in the same Sermon on the Mount. Nowhere can we find a better statement of the interior and exterior mortification that the Christian must practice and also of the spirit of this mortification. To show this, it will suffice to recall some of the Savior's words.

The true Christian ought as far as possible to exclude from his heart all resentment, all animosity: "If therefore thou offer thy gift at the altar, and there thou remember that thy brother hath anything against thee; leave there thy offering before the altar, and go first to be reconciled to thy brother; and then coming thou shalt offer thy gift."⁷⁶⁸ "Go first to be reconciled to thy brother"; we must see in him not only an adversary, but a brother, a son of God. Blessed are the meek. One day a young Israelite, who knew the Our Father, received the inspiration to pardon his greatest enemy; he did so, and immediately received the grace to believe in the entire Gospel and the Church.

Christ preaches also the mortification of concupiscence, of the evil gaze, of evil desire, by which one would already commit adultery in his heart: "If thy right eye scandalize thee, pluck it out and cast it from thee...; if thy right hand scandalize thee, cut it off...; for it is expedient for thee that one of thy members should perish, rather than that thy whole body go into hell."⁷⁶⁹ Our Lord could not express Himself in a more energetic manner. This explains why, for the conquering of certain temptations, the saints advise recourse to fasts, vigils, and other bodily austerities, which, when practiced with discretion, obedience, and generosity, keep the body in subjection and assure liberty of spirit.⁷⁷⁰

The Sermon on the Mount also speaks of the mortification of every inordinate desire of vengeance: "You have heard that it hath been said: An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth. But I say to you not to resist evil."⁷⁷¹ Do not reply to an insult with acrimony in order to avenge yourself. Unquestionably you must resist even to death him who would lead you to evil; but bear offenses patiently, without hatred or irritation. "If one strike thee on thy right cheek, turn to him also the other. And if a man will contend with thee in judgment and take away thy coat, let go thy cloak also unto him":⁷⁷² that is to say, be ready to bear injustice with longanimity. This is the patience that breaks the anger of an adversary and sometimes converts him, as can be seen in the three centuries of persecution which the early Church had to endure. The Christian ought to be less preoccupied with jealously defending his temporal rights than with winning over to God the soul of his irritated brother. Here we see the height of Christian justice, which ought always to be united to charity. The perfect are here admonished that it is not fitting for them to enter into litigation, unless for the sake of higher interests of which they have charge.⁷⁷³

In the same chapter, the Savior asks us to mortify egoism, self-love, which inclines us to flee from him who wishes to ask us

for a service,⁷⁷⁴ to mortify rash judgment,⁷⁷⁵ spiritual pride, and hypocrisy, which incline men to perform good works or to pray before men “to be seen by them.”⁷⁷⁶

Finally, Christ points out to us what the spirit of mortification ought to be: death to sin and its consequences out of love for God. Our Lord’s manner of stating His doctrine is most amiable, as opposed to the proud austerity of the Jansenists. In St. Matthew’s Gospel, He tells us: “When you fast, be not as the hypocrites, sad. For they disfigure their faces, that they may appear unto men to fast. Amen I say to you, they have received their reward. But thou, when thou fastest, anoint thy head, and wash thy face; that thou appear not to men to fast, but to thy Father who is in secret: and thy Father who seeth in secret, will repay thee.”⁷⁷⁷ As the fathers have understood this text, Christ would have us perfume our heads with the oil of charity, mercy, and spiritual joy: wash our faces, that is, purify our souls of all spirit of ostentation. When we accomplish these acts of piety, it is not forbidden us to be seen, but to wish to be seen, for we would thus lose purity of intention, which ought to be directed immediately to the Father present in the secret of our souls.

Such is the spirit of Christian mortification or austerity, which the Jansenists did not understand; it is the spirit of love of God and love of neighbor. It is the spirit of love that radiates on souls to save them; therefore it is the spirit of gentleness, for how can we be meek, even with those who are ill-tempered, without learning to conquer ourselves, to possess our souls? It is a spirit which leads us to offer to God all painful occurrences, so that even these things may help us to advance toward Him and to save souls, and that all, even the obstacles that we encounter, may cooperate unto good, as Jesus made His cross the great means of salvation.

With this idea in mind, we see that, by this spirit of love of God, Christian mortification rises like a summit above the effeminacy of practical naturalism and above harsh and proud austerity. This is the mortification we find in the saints who are stamped with the image of Jesus crucified, whether saints of the early Church, like the first martyrs, or those of the Middle Ages, like St. Bernard, St. Dominic, St. Francis of Assisi, or those of more recent times, like St. Benedict Joseph Labre, the Cure of Ars, or those more recently canonized, such as St. John Bosco and St. Joseph Cotelengo. *Mirabilis Deus in sanctis suis.*

Mortification According to St. Paul and the Reasons for Its Necessity

The doctrine of the Gospel on the necessity of mortification is explained at considerable length by St. Paul in his epistles. Frequent quotation is made of his words: "I chastise my body and bring it into subjection: lest perhaps, when I have preached to others, I myself should become a castaway."⁷⁷⁸ Likewise he says to the Galatians: "They that are Christ's have crucified their flesh, with the vices and concupiscences. If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit."⁷⁷⁹

Not only does St. Paul affirm the necessity of mortification, but he gives reasons for it which may be reduced to four; they are precisely those which are disregarded by practical naturalism. The mortification of all that is inordinate in us is necessary: (1) because of the consequences of original sin; (2) because of the results of our personal sins; (3) because of the infinite elevation of our supernatural end; (4) because we must imitate our crucified Lord.

Considering these different motives, we shall see what interior and exterior mortification is for St. Paul. It is attached to many of the virtues, since each one excludes the contrary vices, and particularly to the virtue of penance, which ought to be inspired by love of God, and which has for its end the destruction in us of the consequences of sin as an offense against God.⁷⁸⁰

THE CONSEQUENCES OF ORIGINAL SIN

First of all, St. Paul draws a parallel between Christ the Author of our salvation and Adam the author of our ruin, and notes the consequences of original sin. To the Romans he says: "By one man sin entered into this world, and by sin death."⁷⁸¹ And again: "By the disobedience of one man, many were made sinners.... Where sin abounded, grace did more abound... through Jesus Christ our Lord."⁷⁸²

With infirmities and maladies, death is one of the results of original sin, but there is also concupiscence, of which St. Paul speaks when he says: "Walk in the spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lusts of the flesh. For the flesh lusteth against the spirit."⁷⁸³

According to the Apostle, this is the condition of the "old man," that is, of man such as he is born of Adam, with a fallen and wounded nature. We read in the Epistle to the Ephesians: "You have heard Him, and have been taught in Him... to put off, according to former conversation, the old man, who is corrupted according to the desire of error. And be renewed in the spirit of your mind: and put on the new man, who according to God is created in justice and holiness of truth."⁷⁸⁴ St. Paul writes in the same vein to the Colossians: "Lie not one to another: stripping yourselves of the old man with his deeds, and putting on the new, him who is renewed unto knowledge, according to the image of Him that created him."⁷⁸⁵

Again, he writes to the Romans: "For I am delighted with the law of God, according to the inward man: but I see another law in my members, fighting against the law of my mind and captivating me in the law of sin that is in my members. Unhappy man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death?"⁷⁸⁶

The old man, such as he is born of Adam, has a certain lack of balance in his wounded nature. This will be evident if we recall the nature of original justice. In it there was perfect harmony between God and the soul, made to know Him, to love Him, and to serve Him; and also between the soul and the body. In fact, as long as the soul was subject to God, the passions or sensible emotions were obedient to right reason enlightened by faith, and to the will vivified by charity. The body itself shared this harmony by privilege, in the sense that it was not subject to sickness or death.

Original sin destroyed this harmony. The first man, by his sin, as the Council of Trent says, "lost for himself and for us sanctity and original justice,"⁷⁸⁷ and transmitted to us a fallen nature, deprived of grace and wounded. Without falling into the exaggerations of the Jansenists, we must admit, with St. Thomas, that we are born with our will turned away from God, inclined to evil, weak in regard to the good,⁷⁸⁸ with our reason prone to error,⁷⁸⁹ our sensitive appetites strongly disposed to inordinate pleasure and to anger, source of every type of injustice.⁷⁹⁰ Whence come pride, forgetfulness of God, egoism under all its forms, often a gross almost unconscious egoism, which wishes at any cost to find happiness on earth without aspiring any higher. In this sense, we can truly say with the author of *The Imitation*: "Nature proposes self as her end, but grace does all things purely out of love for God."⁷⁹¹ St. Thomas speaks in the same way: "Inordinate love of self is the cause of every sin."⁷⁹²

The fathers, in particular Venerable Bede, state in their explanation of the parable of the Good Samaritan that fallen man is not only stripped of grace and of the privileges of the state of original justice, but is even wounded in his nature. "By the sin of the first parent, man was despoiled of grace and wounded in nature." This is explained especially by the fact that we are born with our will turned away from God, directly averted from our supernatural last end, and indirectly from our natural last end;

for every sin against the supernatural law is indirectly contrary to the natural law which obliges us to obey whatever God may command.⁷⁹³

This disorder and weakness of the will in fallen man are shown by the fact that we cannot, without healing grace, love God, the Author of our nature, efficaciously and more than ourselves.⁷⁹⁴ There is also the disorder of concupiscence, which is visible enough for St. Thomas to see in it “a quite probable sign of original sin,” a sign which adds its confirmation to what revelation says about the sin of the first man.⁷⁹⁵ In place of the original triple harmony (between God and the soul, between the soul and the body, between the body and exterior things), appears the triple disorder which St. John speaks of when he writes: “For all that is in the world is the concupiscence of the flesh and the concupiscence of the eyes and the pride of life, which is not of the Father, but is of the world.”⁷⁹⁶

Undoubtedly baptism cleanses us from original sin by applying Christ’s merits to us, by giving us sanctifying grace and the infused virtues. Thus, by the virtue of faith our reason is supernaturally enlightened, and by the virtues of hope and charity our will is turned to God. We also receive the infused virtues which rectify the sensible appetites. However, there remains in the baptized who continue in the state of grace an original weakness, wounds in the process of healing, which sometimes cause us to suffer, and which are left to us, says St. Thomas, as an occasion for struggle and merit.⁷⁹⁷

This is what St. Paul says to the Romans: “Our old man is crucified with Him, that the body of sin may be destroyed, to the end that we may serve sin no longer.... Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, so as to obey the lusts thereof.”⁷⁹⁸ Not only must this “old man” be moderated, regulated; he must be mortified or made to die. Otherwise we shall never succeed in obtaining the mastery over our passions and we shall remain more or less their slaves. This will mean opposition, perpetual struggle between nature and grace. If unmortified souls do not perceive this struggle, it is because grace is scarcely alive in them; egoistic nature has free play, with some virtues of temperament, natural happy inclinations that are judged to be true virtues.

Mortification is, therefore, imposed upon us because of the consequences of original sin, which remain even in the baptized as an occasion of struggle, and of struggle indispensable in order not to fall into actual and personal sin. We do not repent of original sin, which is a “sin of nature,” which was voluntary only in the first man; but we must labor to rid ourselves of the withering effects of original sin, in particular concupiscence, which inclines us to sin. By so doing, the wounds of which we spoke above are healed more and more with the increase of the grace which heals and which, at the same time, raises us up to a new life (*gratia sanans et elevans*). Far from destroying nature by the practice of mortification, grace restores it, heals it, and renders it increasingly pliable or docile in the hands of God.

THE CONSEQUENCES OF OUR PERSONAL SINS

A second motive that renders mortification necessary is found in the consequences of our personal sins. St. Paul insists on this point in the Epistle to the Galatians, by noting especially the effects of sins against charity: “By charity of the spirit serve one another. For all the law is fulfilled in one word: Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. But if you bite and devour one another, take heed you be not consumed one of another. I say then, walk in the spirit (that is, the spirit of the new man enlightened and fortified by the Holy Spirit),⁷⁹⁹ and you shall not fulfill the lusts of the flesh.... Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are fornication, uncleanness, immodesty, luxury, idolatry, witchcrafts, enmities, contentions, emulations, wraths, quarrels, dissensions.... But the fruit of the Spirit is charity, joy, peace, patience, benignity, goodness, longanimity, mildness, faith, modesty, continency, chastity.... They that are Christ’s have crucified their flesh, with the vices and concupiscences.”⁸⁰⁰

Mortification is clearly imposed on us by reason of the effects of our personal sins. Renewed actual sin engenders a habitual bad disposition which, when grave, is called a vice or at least a defect. These defects are habitual modes of seeing, judging, willing, and acting, which combine to form an imperfect mentality, a spirit which is not that of God. And sometimes they translate themselves to our exterior, so much so that someone has rightly said that at thirty or forty years of age every man is responsible for his own countenance, according as it expresses pride, self-sufficiency, presumption, contempt, or disillusionment. These defects become traits of character, and little by little God’s image is effaced in us.

When sins are confessed with contrition or sufficient attrition, absolution obliterates sin, but it leaves certain dispositions, called the remnants of sin, *reliquiae peccati*,⁸⁰¹ which are, as it were, imprinted in us, like a furrow in our faculties, in our character and temperament. Thus the seat of covetousness remains after baptism. It is certain, for example, that although a man who has fallen into the vice of drunkenness and who accuses himself of it with sufficient attrition receives together with pardon sanctifying grace and the infused virtue of temperance, he preserves an inclination to this vice, and, unless he flees from the occasions, he will fall again. This trying inclination must not only be moderated, it must be mortified, made to die in order to unfetter both nature and grace.

The same is true of our unreasonable antipathies. They must be not merely veiled, not only moderated, but mortified, because they are seeds of death. That from this point of view an idea may be formed of the necessity of mortification, we must bear in

mind the numerous vices that are born of each of the seven capital sins. For example, from envy are born hatred, slander, calumny, joy at the misfortune of another, and sadness at his success. From anger, which is opposed to meekness, come disputes, fits of passion, insults, abusive words, and at times blasphemy. From vainglory spring disobedience, boasting, hypocrisy, contention through rivalry, discord, love of novelties, and stubbornness. St. Thomas lays emphasis on each of these vices which spring from the capital sins⁸⁰² and which are sometimes more grave than they. The field of mortification is consequently very wide.

Finally in a spirit of penance, we must mortify ourselves to expiate past sin that has already been forgiven and to help us avoid sin in the future. The virtue of penance leads us, in fact, not only to hatred of sin as an offense against God, but still more to reparation. For this last, to stop sinning is not sufficient; a satisfaction must be offered to divine justice, for every sin merits a punishment, as every act inspired by charity merits a reward.⁸⁰³ Consequently, when sacramental absolution, which remits sin, is given to us, a penance or satisfaction is imposed upon us that we may thus obtain the remission of the temporal punishment, which ordinarily remains to be undergone. This satisfaction is a part of the sacrament of penance which applies the Savior's merits to us; and as such, it contributes to our restoration to grace and to its increase in us.⁸⁰⁴

Thus is paid, at least in part, the debt contracted by the sinner in regard to divine justice. To this end, man must also bear patiently the sufferings of this life, and if this patient endurance does not suffice to purify him completely, he must pass through purgatory, for nothing defiled can enter heaven. The dogma of purgatory thus strongly confirms the necessity of mortification, because it shows us that we must pay our debt, either in this life while meriting, or after death without meriting.

A repentance full of love effaces both the sin and the punishment, as did those blessed tears on which Christ bestowed His benediction, saying: "Many sins are forgiven her, because she hath loved much."⁸⁰⁵

It is important to accuse ourselves especially of sins that are becoming habitual and most hinder our union with God. This is more important than to aim at a complete enumeration of venial sins

Since penance is necessary to every Christian, how can the necessity of mortification be denied? Such a denial would be an utter disregard of the gravity of sin and its consequences. He who is opposed to mortification comes little by little to drink of iniquity as if it were water; he reaches the point where he calls what is often truly venial sin, an imperfection, and what is a mortal sin, a human weakness. Let us remember that Christian temperance differs specifically from acquired temperance, and that it exacts a mortification unknown to the pagan philosophers.⁸⁰⁶

Neither ought we to forget that we have to contend against the spirit of the world and against the devil, according to St. Paul's words to the Ephesians: "Put you on the armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the deceits of the devil. For our wrestling is not against flesh and blood, but against principalities and powers, against the rulers of the world of this darkness, against the spirits of wickedness in the high places.... Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth and having on the breastplate of justice, and your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace."⁸⁰⁷

To resist the enemy's temptation, which leads first of all to light faults and then to graver ones, Christ Himself told us that we must have recourse to prayer, fasting, and almsgiving.⁸⁰⁸ And then the temptation will become the occasion of meritorious acts of faith, confidence in God, and love of God. We shall find ourselves in the happy necessity of being unable to rest content with imperfect acts of virtue (*actus remissi*); we shall have to resort to more intense and more meritorious acts.

THE INFINITE ELEVATION OF OUR SUPERNATURAL END DEMANDS A SPECIAL MORTIFICATION OR ABNEGATION

We saw in the preceding chapter that in the Sermon on the Mount our Lord demands the mortification of the slightest inordinate interior movements of anger, sensuality, and pride, because we ought, He says, to be "perfect as also your heavenly Father is perfect,"⁸⁰⁹ since we have received a participation in His intimate life, and since we are called to see Him immediately as He sees Himself, and to love Him as He loves Himself.

From the fact that we are called to a supernatural end of infinite elevation, since it is God Himself in His intimate life, it is not sufficient for us to live according to right reason, subordinating our passions to it. We must always act not only as rational beings, but as children of God, in whom reason is subordinate to faith, and every action is inspired by charity. This obliges us to detachment in regard to all that belongs only to the earth, or is purely natural, in regard to all that cannot be a means of drawing nearer to God and of leading souls to Him. In this sense we must combat the different forms of natural eagerness, which would absorb our activity to the detriment of the life of grace.

In virtue of this principle, St. Paul says to us: "Therefore, if you be risen with Christ (by baptism), seek the things that are above, where Christ is sitting at the right hand of God. Mind the things that are above, not the things that are upon the earth. For you are dead; and your life is hid with Christ in God.... Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth,... evil concupiscence, and covetousness,... anger, indignation."⁸¹⁰

Likewise he writes to the Ephesians: "For by Him we have access both in one Spirit to the Father. Now therefore you are no more strangers and foreigners; but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and the domestics of God, built upon the foundation

of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone: in whom all the building, being framed together, groweth up into a holy temple in the Lord. In whom you also are built together into a habitation of God in the Spirit.”⁸¹¹

Therefore, even if a person does not bind himself to the effective practice of the evangelical counsels of poverty, chastity, and obedience, he must have the spirit of the counsels, that is, the spirit of detachment: “The time is short (for the journey toward eternity). It remaineth, that they also who have wives be as if they had none; and they that weep, as though they wept not; and they that rejoice, as if they rejoiced not; and they that buy, as though they possessed not; and they that use this world, as if they used it not. For the fashion of this world passeth away.”⁸¹² A man must not try to settle down in this world if he truly wishes to make progress toward God, if he wishes to make profitable use of time to advance toward eternity. The infinite loftiness of our supernatural end demands a special abnegation in regard to whatever is simply human, even though legitimate, for we might become absorbed in it to the detriment of the life of grace.

This is particularly true for apostles: “No man, being a soldier to God, entangleth himself with secular businesses; that he may please Him to whom he hath engaged himself.”⁸¹³ Likewise, the soldier of Christ ought to avoid becoming entangled in the things of the world; he should use them as though not using them; otherwise he would become as “a tinkling cymbal,” and would lose the spirit of Christ. He would be like salt that has lost its savor “and is good for nothing anymore but to be cast out, and to be trodden on by men.”

Nothing is more certain. From all that is purely of this earth the Christian ought to have a detachment, a special abnegation which is demanded by the infinite loftiness of the eternal goal toward which he ought to advance every day with greater rapidity; for the nearer we approach to God, the more we are drawn by Him.

THE NECESSITY OF IMITATING JESUS CRUCIFIED

A fourth reason obliging us to mortification or abnegation is the necessity of imitating Jesus crucified. He Himself tells us: “If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily.”⁸¹⁴ St. Paul adds: “For whosoever are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God.... And if sons, heirs also; heirs indeed of God, and joint-heirs with Christ: yet so, if we suffer with Him, that we may be also glorified with Him. For I reckon that the sufferings of this time are not worthy to be compared with the glory to come, that shall be revealed in us.”⁸¹⁵

Evidently this spirit of detachment is so much the more imposed on us as we are called to a higher, more abundant, and more radiating interior life, in which we ought to follow more closely the example of Christ, who came, not as a philosopher or a sociologist, but as the Savior, and who out of love willed to die on the cross in order to redeem us. He came to accomplish, not a human work of philanthropy but a divine work of charity, even to complete sacrifice, which is the great proof of love. Without a doubt this is what St. Paul means.

The Apostle of the Gentiles completely lived what he taught. Consequently, while describing his life of hardship and suffering, he could write: “But we have this treasure (the light of life of the gospel) in earthen vessels, that the excellency (of the gospel) may be of the power of God and not of us. In all things we suffer tribulation, but are not distressed; we are straitened, but are not destitute; we suffer persecution, but are not forsaken (by God); we are cast down, but we perish not: always bearing about in our body the mortification of Jesus, that the life also of Jesus may be made manifest in our bodies.... So then death worketh in us, but life in you.”⁸¹⁶

In his commentary on II Cor. 4: 7, St. Thomas says: “If the apostles were rich, powerful, noble according to the flesh, everything great that they accomplished would be attributed to them and not to God. But because they were poor and despised, what was sublime in their ministry is attributed to God. This explains why our Lord willed that they should be exposed to tribulations and to contempt.... And because they trusted in God and hoped in Jesus Christ, they were not crushed.... They bore affliction and the dangers of death patiently that they might thus attain to the life of glory as the Savior did: ‘Always bearing about in our body the mortification of Jesus, that the life also of Jesus may be made manifest in our bodies.’”

St. Paul says further: “For I think that God hath set forth us apostles, the last.... We are reviled; and we bless. We are persecuted; and we suffer it. We are blasphemed; and we entreat. We are made as the refuse of this world, the offscouring of all, even until now.”⁸¹⁷ St. Paul here describes the life of the apostles from Pentecost until their martyrdom. Thus we read in the Acts of the Apostles that, after they had been scourged, “they indeed went from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were accounted worthy to suffer reproach for the name of Jesus.”⁸¹⁸ They truly carried their cross and were thus stamped in the image of Christ that they might continue the work of the redemption by the same means as the Savior Himself had employed.

This spirit of detachment through imitation of Jesus crucified was singularly striking during the first three centuries of persecution which followed the founding of the Church. The letters of St. Ignatius of Antioch and the acts of the martyrs make this clear.

This same spirit of detachment and of configuration to Christ is found in all the saints, both ancient and modern: in St.

Benedict, St. Bernard, St. Dominic, St. Francis of Assisi, St. Teresa, St. John of the Cross, and, nearer our day, St. Benedict Joseph Labre, the Cure of Ars, and, among the most recently canonized, St. John Bosco, and St. Joseph Cotelengo.

The spirit of detachment, of abnegation, is the condition of a close union with God, whence supernatural life overflows in a manner ever new, and at times stupendous, for the eternal welfare of souls. This is evidenced by the lives of all the saints without exception, and we ought to nourish our souls daily with the examples of these great servants of God. The world is not so much in need of philosophers and sociologists, as of saints who are the living image of the Savior among us.

According to St. Paul, the following reasons show the necessity of mortification or abnegation: (1) the consequences of original sin which incline us to evil; (2) the results of our personal sins; (3) the infinite loftiness of our supernatural end; (4) the necessity of imitating Jesus crucified. These are precisely the four motives disregarded by practical naturalism which reappeared some years ago in Americanism and Modernism.

These four motives of mortification can be reduced to two: hatred of sin and love of God and of our Lord Jesus Christ. Such is the spirit of holy realism, and basically of Christian optimism, which ought to inspire exterior and interior mortification. These remain to be treated more in detail. The true answer to practical naturalism is the love of Jesus crucified, which leads us to resemble Him and to save souls with Him by the same means as He used.

Mortification or abnegation thus understood, far from destroying nature, liberates it, restores it, heals it. It opens up to us the profound meaning of the maxim: To serve God, is to reign: that is, to reign over our passions, over the spirit of the world, its false principles and its example, over the devil and his perversity; to reign with God by sharing increasingly in His intimate life, in virtue of this great law, namely, that if life does not descend, it ascends.

Man cannot live without love, and if he renounces every inferior love which leads to death, he opens his soul ever wider to the love of God and of souls in God. The Savior Himself declares: "If any man thirst, let him come to Me, and drink.... Out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water" for the eternal good of souls.

Sins to be Avoided Their Roots and Their Consequences

We have treated in general of the necessity of mortification and abnegation because of the consequences both of original sin and of our personal sins, and also because of the infinite elevation of our supernatural end and the necessity of imitating Jesus crucified. We shall consider somewhat in detail the principal sins to be avoided, their roots, and their consequences. St. Thomas does so in treating of the seven capital sins.⁸¹⁹ With the aid of his work, we can make a serious and profound examination of conscience, especially if we ask for the light of the Holy Spirit, in order to see from above the stains on our souls, a little as the Lord Himself sees them. The gifts of knowledge and counsel can here greatly fill out what Christian prudence tells us; with it an increasingly enlightened, upright, and certain conscience will be developed in us.

We shall consider, first of all, the roots of the capital sins; then we will speak of their consequences.

THE ROOTS OF THE CAPITAL SINS

As shown by St. Gregory the Great⁸²⁰ and, following him in a more profound manner, also by St. Thomas,⁸²¹ the capital sins of pride⁸²², sloth,⁸²³ envy, anger, avarice, gluttony, and luxury are not the gravest sins of all; they are less grave than heresy, apostasy, despair, and hatred of God. But the capital sins are those toward which we are first of all inclined, and which lead to a separation from God and to still graver sins. Man does not reach complete perversity all of a sudden; he is led to it progressively, by a gradual descent to evil.

In the first place we must examine the root of the seven capital sins. As St. Thomas says, they all spring from inordinate self-love or egoism, which hinders us from loving God above all else and inclines us to turn away from Him. St. Augustine says: "Two loves built two cities: the love of self even to contempt of God built the city of Babylon, that is, that of the world and of immorality; the love of God even to contempt of self built the city of God."⁸²⁴

Evidently we sin, that is, we turn away from God or become estranged from Him, only because we desire and will to have a created good in a manner not conformable to the divine law.⁸²⁵ This comes about only by reason of an inordinate love of ourselves, which is thus the source of every sin. This inordinate self-love or egoism must not only be moderated, but mortified so that an ordered love of self may prevail in us. This love is the secondary act of charity, by which the just man loves himself for God in order to glorify God in time and eternity. Whereas the sinner in the state of mortal sin loves himself above all else and in practice prefers himself to God, the just man loves God more than himself and must, in addition, love himself in God and for God. He must love his body that it may serve the soul instead of being an obstacle to its higher life; he must love his soul that it may live eternally with divine life. He must love his intellect and will that they may live increasingly by the light and love of God. Such is manifestly the broad meaning of the mortification of self-love, of self-will, which is opposed to that of God. Life must be prevented from descending, so that it may rise toward Him who is the source of every good and of all beatitude. Nothing is clearer.

Inordinate self-love leads us to death, according to the Savior's words: "He that loveth his life (in an egotistical manner) shall lose it; and he that hateth (or sacrifices) his life in this world, keepeth it unto life eternal"⁸²⁶ In the saints this love of God reaches even to contempt of self, that is, even to real and effective contempt of all that is inordinate in us.

From inordinate self-love, the root of every sin, spring the three concupiscences which St. John speaks of, when he says: "For all that is in the world is the concupiscence of the flesh and the concupiscence of the eyes and the pride of life, which is not of the Father, but is of the world."⁸²⁷ These are, in fact, the three great manifestations of the spirit of the world in regard to the goods of the body, to exterior goods, and to the goods of the spirit. One is thus led to confound apparent good and real good in these three orders.⁸²⁸

St. Thomas observes that the sins of the flesh are more shameful than those of the spirit, for they lower man to the level of the brute; but those of the spirit, such as pride, the only ones that exist in the devil, are more grave for they are more directly opposed to God and turn us more away from Him.⁸²⁹

The concupiscence of the flesh is the inordinate desire of what is, or seems to be, useful to the preservation of the individual and of the species; from this inordinate or sensual love arise gluttony and lust. Voluptuousness can thus become an idol and blind us more and more.

The concupiscence of the eyes is the inordinate desire of all that can please the sight: of luxury, wealth, money which makes it possible for us to procure worldly goods. From it is born avarice. The avaricious man ends by making his hidden treasure

his god, adoring it, and sacrificing everything to it: his time, his strength, his family, and sometimes his eternity.

The pride of life is the inordinate love of our own excellence, of all that can emphasize it, no matter how hard or difficult that may be. He who yields more and more to pride ends by becoming his own god, as Lucifer did. From this vice all sin and perdition may spring; whence the importance of humility, a fundamental virtue, just as pride is the source of every sin.

According to St. Gregory and St. Thomas,⁸³⁰ pride or arrogance is more than a capital sin; it is the root from which proceed especially four capital sins: vanity or vainglory, spiritual sloth or wicked sadness which embitters, envy, and anger. Vanity is the inordinate love of praise and honors. Spiritual sloth saddens the soul at the thought of the labor involved in sanctification, and at the thought of the spiritual good of good works because of the effort and abnegation they require. Envy inclines us to grow sad over another's good, in so far as it appears to oppose our own excellence. Anger, when it is not just indignation but a sin, is an inordinate movement of the soul which inclines us to repulse violently what displeases us; from it arise quarrels, insults, and abusive words. These capital vices, especially spiritual sloth, envy, and anger, engender a wicked sadness that weighs down the soul; they are quite the opposite of spiritual peace and joy, which are the fruits of charity.

All these seeds of death must not only be moderated, but mortified. The original seed is self-love, from which proceed the three concupiscences; and from them, the seven capital sins. This is what made St. Paul say: "If you live according to the flesh, you shall die: but if by the Spirit you mortify the deeds of the flesh, you shall live."⁸³¹

We see this mortification in the lives of the saints, where grace finally dominates all the inclinations of fallen nature in order to restore our nature, to heal it, and to communicate a higher life to it. This is clear for the Christian mind, and the generous practice of such mortification prepares the soul for the more profound purifications that God Himself sends in order to destroy completely the seeds of death that still subsist in our sensible appetites and higher faculties. It is not enough, however, to consider the roots of the seven capital sins; we must examine their consequences.

THE CONSEQUENCES OF THE SEVEN CAPITAL SINS

By the consequences of sin are generally understood the remnants of sin (*reliquiae peccati*), the evil inclinations left, so to speak, in our temperament even after sin has been forgiven, as concupiscence, which is a remnant of original sin, remains after baptism, like a wound in the course of healing. The consequences of the capital sins may also mean the other sins that spring from them. The capital sins are so called because they are like the head or the principle of many others. We are, first of all, inclined toward them, and by them in turn toward sins that are often more serious.

Thus vainglory or vanity engenders disobedience, boasting, hypocrisy, contention through rivalry, discord, love of novelties, and stubbornness. It is a vice that may lead to most lamentable falls and apostasy.

Spiritual sloth, disgust for spiritual things and for the work of sanctification, because of the effort it demands, is a vice directly opposed to the love of God and to the holy joy that results from it. Sloth engenders malice, rancor or bitterness toward our neighbor, pusillanimity in the face of duty to be accomplished, discouragement, spiritual torpor, forgetfulness of the precepts, seeking after forbidden things. Slipping downward on the slope of pride, vainglory, and spiritual sloth, many have lost their vocation.

In the same way, envy or willful displeasure at the sight of another's good, as if it were an evil for us, engenders hatred, slander, calumny, joy at the misfortune of another, and sadness at his success.

Gluttony and sensuality also produce other vices and may lead to blindness of spirit, to hardness of heart, to attachment to the present life even to the loss of hope of eternal life, and to love of self even to hatred of God, and to final impenitence.

The capital sins are often mortal; they are venial only when the matter is light or the consent not complete. They may exist under a very gross form, as happens in many souls in the state of mortal sin; but they may also exist, as St. John of the Cross points out,⁸³² in souls in the state of grace, as so many departures from the course of the spiritual life. It is thus that spiritual pride, spiritual gluttony, spiritual sensuality, and spiritual sloth are spoken of. Spiritual pride induces us, for example, to flee from those who reproach us, even when they have the authority to do so and are acting justly; it may even induce us to hold a certain rancor against them. As for spiritual gluttony, it may make us desire sensible consolations in piety, to the point of seeking ourselves in it more than we seek God. With spiritual pride, it is the origin of false mysticism.

Happily, contrary to what is true of the virtues, these vices or defects are not connected. One may have some without the others; several indeed are contradictory: for example, one cannot be avaricious and prodigal at one and the same time.

But we have to practice numerous virtues, forty or more, if we count all the virtues annexed to the principal ones. With the exception of justice, each stands like a summit between two contrary vices: the one by excess, such as temerity; the other by defect, such as cowardice.

Moreover, certain defects resemble certain virtues: for instance, pride is in some ways similar to magnanimity. It is important to have discretion or Christian prudence to discern clearly the virtue from the defect which in certain respects resembles it. Otherwise, false notes may be struck on the keyboard of the virtues: for example, pusillanimity may be

confounded with humility, severity with justice, weakness with mercy.

THE EXAMINATION OF CONSCIENCE

The enumeration of all these ignoble fruits of inordinate selflove should induce us to make a serious examination of conscience. Moreover, their number shows us that the field of mortification is very wide if we wish to live the true life in a thoroughgoing way. The quietists declared the examination of conscience useless, because, they said, the human heart is inscrutable. They even asserted that such examination was harmful, as all reflection on self would hinder us from thinking of God in naked faith.⁸³³

Such statements are aberrations easily refuted. Precisely because it is difficult to know the true nature of our interior feelings, we must examine them closely. And this examination, far from turning us away from the thought of God, should keep bringing us back to it. Moreover, we must ask for divine light to see our soul a little as God Himself sees it, to see our day or the week that has just ended somewhat as it is written in the book of life, somewhat as we shall see it at the last judgment. Thus to see ourselves, we ought every evening to search out with humility and contrition the faults that we have committed in thought, word, deed, and omission.

On the other hand, in this examination we should avoid the excess opposed to that of the quietists, that is to say, the minute search for the slightest faults under their purely material aspect, a search which sometimes leads to scruples or to forgetfulness of important things. The examination of conscience aims less at a complete enumeration of venial faults than at seeing and sincerely acknowledging the principle which in our case is generally at their root. To cure a skin eruption, an effort is made to purify the blood rather than to treat each blemish separately. In short, in the examination of conscience the soul ought not to spend too much time in consideration of self and cease to turn its gaze toward God. On the contrary, looking fixedly at God, it should ask itself how the Lord Himself will judge its day, or the week just spent. In what has it been entirely His? In what entirely its own? In what has it sought God sincerely? In what has it sought itself? Then, calmly the soul judges itself as it were from on high, in the light of God, somewhat as it will be judged on the last day. From this consideration we can understand the nobility of the Christian conscience and the holy demands it makes; it is far superior to the conscience of a simple philosopher.

But, as St. Catherine of Siena says in speaking of these holy exactions of conscience, we should not separate the consideration of our faults from that of God's infinite mercy. We should see, on the contrary, our frailty and wretchedness under the radiation of the helpful, infinite Goodness. The examination made in this way, instead of discouraging us, will increase our confidence in God.

The sight of our faults shows us also by contrast the value of virtue. It has been said with great truth that the value of justice is brought home to us especially by the grief which injustice causes us. The sight of the injustice we have committed and our regret for having committed it, should make us "hunger and thirst after justice." The ugliness of sensuality should reveal to us by contrast all the value of purity; the disorder of anger and envy should make us feel the great value of true meekness and true charity; the sight of the disastrous effects of spiritual sloth should reanimate in us the desire for generosity and spiritual joy. The aberration of pride should make us experience to some extent all the wisdom and grandeur of true humility.

For all these reasons, one of the best ways to make an examination of conscience is to do so in the light of the Savior's words: "Learn of Me, for I am meek and humble of heart."

Let us ask the Lord to inspire us with the holy hatred of sin, which separates us from the infinite goodness of God, from whom we have received the greatest benefits and who promises us still more precious gifts if we are faithful. In some respects, the holy hatred of sin is nothing more than the reverse of the love of God. To love truth strongly without detesting error, is impossible; it is likewise impossible to have a strong love for the good and the sovereign Good, which is God, without hating what turns us away from God. In the hearts of the humblest and meekest saints, there is a holy hatred of evil, a hatred that is as strong as their love of God. In the immaculate heart of Mary there is, by reason of her ardent charity, a burning hatred of evil, and this hatred renders her terrible to the devil. According to Blessed Grignon de Montfort, the devil suffers more from being conquered by the humility and love of Mary than from being directly crushed by the divine Omnipotence. We should ask the immaculate heart of Mary and the sacred heart of our Savior, burning furnace of charity, for this holy hatred of evil, this holy hatred of pride, spiritual sloth, envy, unjust anger, malevolence, and sensuality, in order that true charity, the love of God and of souls in God, may truly grow ever stronger in us.

The means of avoiding pride is to think often of the humiliations of the Savior and to ask God for the virtue of humility. To repress envy, we should pray for our neighbor and wish him the same good as we desire for ourselves.

This type of mortification is absolutely indispensable. To advance seriously toward perfection and sanctity, we should think of the mortifications of the saints, or, even without going as far as the examples of the saints, think of those given us by servants of God such as Father Lacordaire who, fearing that he might fall into pride by reason of his successes, had recourse to great mortifications. On certain days while preaching at Notre Dame (Paris), he used to feel that a strong current of grace was

passing through his soul to convert his hearers, and that, if he yielded to the sin of pride, this current of grace might be completely stopped and his preaching become absolutely fruitless. We should meditate on the fact that we also have our souls to save, that we must do good to those around us, good which will endure eternally. Let us also remember that we must work as much as possible for the salvation of other souls, and that for this purpose we ought to employ the means that Christ has pointed out to us: progressive death to sin through progress in the virtues and especially in the love of God.

SINS OF IGNORANCE, FRAILTY, AND MALICE

We have been told that people in certain milieux are inclined to think that only the sin of malice is mortal, and that so-called sins of ignorance and frailty are never mortal. On this point we should recall the teaching of theology, such as it is profoundly formulated by St. Thomas Aquinas in the *Summa*.⁸³⁴

The sin of ignorance is that which springs from voluntary and culpable ignorance, called vincible ignorance. The sin of frailty is that which arises from a strong passion which diminishes liberty and impels the will to give its consent. As for the sin of malice, it is committed with full liberty, *quasi de industria*, intentionally and often with premeditation, even without passion or ignorance. We shall recall what St. Thomas teaches about each of them.

SINS OF IGNORANCE

In relation to the will, ignorance may be either antecedent or consequent or concomitant. Antecedent ignorance is that which is in no way voluntary; it is said to be morally invincible. For example, thinking that he is firing at an animal in the forest, a hunter may kill a man who had given no sign of his presence and whom the hunter would never suspect of being there. In this case there is no voluntary fault, but only a material sin.

Consequent ignorance is that which is voluntary, at least indirectly so, because of negligence in learning what one can and ought to know. It is called vincible ignorance because one could free oneself from it with morally possible application. It is the cause of a formal sin, at least indirectly willed. For example, a medical student yields gravely to sloth; nevertheless, as it were by chance, he receives his medical degree. But he is ignorant of many elementary facts of his profession which he ought to know, and it happens that he hastens the death of some of his patients instead of curing them. In this case there is no directly voluntary sin, but there is certainly an indirectly voluntary fault, which may be grave and which may even go as far as homicide through imprudence or grave negligence.

Concomitant ignorance is that which is not voluntary, but which accompanies sin in such a way that, even if it did not exist, one would still sin. This is the case of a very vindictive man who, wishing to kill his enemy, one day, as a matter of fact, unwittingly does kill him, thinking that he is killing an animal in a thicket. This case is manifestly different from the two preceding cases.

We may conclude, consequently, that involuntary or invincible ignorance is not a sin, but that voluntary or vincible ignorance of what we could and should know is a more or less serious sin according to the gravity of the obligations in which we fail. Voluntary or vincible ignorance cannot completely excuse sin, for there was negligence; it only diminishes culpability. Absolutely involuntary or invincible ignorance completely exculpates from sin; it does away with culpability. As for concomitant ignorance, it does not excuse from sin, for, even if it did not exist, one would still sin.

Invincible ignorance is called “good faith.” That ignorance be truly invincible or involuntary, it is necessary that the person cannot morally free himself from it by a serious effort to know his duties. It is impossible to be invincibly ignorant of the first precepts of the natural law: Do good and avoid evil; do not do to others what you would not wish them to do to you; you shall not kill; you shall not steal; one God alone you shall adore. At least by the order of the world, the starry sky, and the whole creation, man can easily obtain a knowledge of the probability of the existence of God, supreme Ordainer and Legislator. When he has this probability, he must seek to become more enlightened and must ask for light; otherwise he is not in genuine good faith or in absolutely involuntary and invincible ignorance. As much must be said of a Protestant for whom it becomes seriously probable that Catholicism is the true religion. He must clarify his idea by study and ask God for light. Unless he does this, as St. Alphonsus says, he already sins against faith by not wishing to take the means necessary to obtain it.

Pious people are often not sufficiently attentive to sins of ignorance, which they sometimes commit without considering, as they can and ought, their religious duties or the duties of their state, or again the rights and qualities of persons, superiors, equals, or inferiors with whom they are in relation. We are responsible not only for the inordinate acts that we place, but also for the omission of all the good that we ought to do, and that we would accomplish in fact if we had true zeal for the glory of God and the salvation of souls. One of the causes of the present evils of society is found in the forgetfulness of these words of the Gospel: “The poor have the gospel preached to them,” in the indifference of those who possess a superabundance toward those who lack even the necessities of life.

A sin of frailty is one which springs from a strong passion, which impels the will to give its consent. With this meaning, the Psalmist says: “Have mercy on me, a Lord, for I am weak.”⁸³⁵ The spiritual soul is weak when its will yields to the violence of the movements of the sensible appetites. It thus loses rectitude of practical judgment and of voluntary election or choice, by reason of fear, anger, or concupiscence. Thus, during the Passion, Peter yielded through fear and denied our Lord three times. When, by reason of a lively emotion or of a passion, we are inclined toward an object, the intellect is induced to judge that it is suitable for us, and the will to give its consent contrary to the divine law.⁸³⁶

But we must distinguish here the so-called antecedent passion, which precedes the consent of the will, and that called consequent, which follows it. Antecedent passion diminishes culpability, for it diminishes the liberty of judgment and of voluntary choice; it is particularly apparent in very impressionable people. On the contrary, consequent or voluntary passion does not lessen the gravity of sin, but augments it; or rather it is a sign that the sin is more voluntary, since the will itself arouses this inordinate movement of passion, as happens in a man who wishes to become angry the better to manifest his ill will.⁸³⁷ Just as a good consequent passion, such as Christ’s holy anger when He was driving the merchants from the Temple, increases the merit, so an evil consequent passion augments the demerit.

The sin of frailty, of which we are speaking here, is that in which the will yields to the impulse of an antecedent passion; and thereby the gravity of the sin is lessened. This does not mean, however, that it is never a mortal sin. It is truly mortal when the matter is grievous, and the sinner yields to passion with advertence and full consent. This is the case of homicide committed under the impulse of anger.⁸³⁸

A person can resist, especially at the beginning, the inordinate movement of passion. If he does not resist it at the beginning as he ought, if he does not pray as he ought to obtain the help of God, passion is no longer simply antecedent, it becomes voluntary.

The sin of frailty, even when serious and mortal, is more pardonable than another, but here “pardonable” is by no means a synonym for “venial” in the current meaning of this word.⁸³⁹

Even pious people ought to be attentive to this point for they may have unrepressed movements of jealousy which may lead them to grave faults: for example, to serious rash judgments and to words and exterior acts which are the cause of profound breaches, contrary both to justice and to charity.

It would be a gross error to think that only the sin of malice can be mortal because it alone implies the sufficient advertence, the full consent, together with the serious matter, necessary for the sin which gives death to the soul and renders it worthy of eternal death. Such an error would result from a badly formed conscience, and would contribute to increase this deformity. Let us remember that we can easily resist the beginning of the inordinate movement of passion, and that it is a duty for us to do so and also to pray for help, according to the words of St. Augustine, quoted by the Council of Trent: “God never commands the impossible, but, in commanding, He warns us to do what we are able and to ask Him for help to do that which we cannot.”⁸⁴⁰

THE SIN OF MALICE

In contradistinction to the sin of ignorance and that of frailty, the sin of malice is that by which one chooses evil knowingly. In Latin it is called a sin *de industria*, that is, a sin committed with deliberate calculation, design, and express intention, free from ignorance and even from antecedent passion. The sin of malice is often premeditated. This is not equivalent to saying that evil is willed for the sake of evil; since the adequate object of the will is the good, it can will evil only under the aspect of an apparent good.

Now he who sins through malice, acting with full knowledge of the case and through evil will, knowingly wills a spiritual evil (for example, the loss of charity or divine friendship) in order to possess a temporal good. It is clear that this sin thus defined differs in the degree of gravity from the sin of ignorance and that of frailty. But we must not conclude from this that every sin of malice is a sin against the Holy Ghost. This last sin is one of the gravest of the sins of malice. It is produced when a man rejects through contempt the very thing that would save him or deliver him from evil: for example, when he combats recognized religious truth, or when by reason of jealousy, he deliberately grows sad over the graces and spiritual progress of his neighbor.

The sin of malice often proceeds from a vice engendered by multiple faults; but it can exist even in the absence of this vice. It is thus that the first sin of the devil was a sin of malice, not of habitual malice but of actual malice, of evil will, of an intoxication of pride.

It is clear that the sin of malice is graver than the sins of ignorance and frailty, although these last are sometimes mortal. This explains why human laws inflict greater punishment for premeditated murder than for that committed through passion.

The greatest gravity of the sins of malice comes from the fact that they are more voluntary than the others, from the fact that they generally proceed from a vice engendered by repeated sins, and from the fact that by them man knowingly prefers a

temporal good to the divine friendship, without the partial excuse of a certain ignorance or of a strong passion.

In these questions one may err in two ways that are contradictory to each other. Some lean to the opinion that only the sin of malice can be mortal; they do not see with sufficient clearness the gravity of certain sins of voluntary ignorance and of certain sins of frailty, in which, nevertheless, there is serious matter, sufficient advertence, and full consent.

Others, on the contrary, do not see clearly enough the gravity of certain sins of malice committed in cold blood, with an affected moderation and a pretense of good will or of tolerance. Those who thus combat the true religion and take away from children the bread of divine truth may be sinning more gravely than he who blasphemes and kills someone under the impulse of anger.

Sin is so much the more grave as it is more voluntary, as it is committed with greater light and proceeds from a more inordinate love of self, which sometimes even goes so far as contempt of God. On the other hand, a virtuous act is more or less meritorious according as it is more voluntary, more free, and as it is inspired by a greater love of God and neighbor, a love that may even reach holy contempt of self, as St. Augustine says.

Thus he who prays with too great attachment to sensible consolation merits less than he who perseveres in prayer in a continual and profound aridity without any consolation. But on emerging from this trial, his merit does not grow less if his prayer proceeds from an equal degree of charity which now has a happy reaction on his sensibility. It is still true that one interior act of pure love is of greater value in the eyes of God than many exterior works inspired by a lesser charity.

In all these questions, whether good or evil is involved, particular attention must be paid to what proceeds from our higher faculties, the intellect and will: that is, to the act of the will following full knowledge of the case. And, from this point of view, if an evil act committed with full deliberation and consent, like a formal pact with the devil, has formidable consequences, a good act, such as the oblation of self to God, made with full deliberation and consent and frequently renewed, can have even greater consequences in the order of good; for the Holy Ghost is of a certainty infinitely more powerful than the spirit of evil, and He can do more for our sanctification than the latter can for our ruin. It is well to think of this in the face of the gravity of certain present-day events. The love of Christ, dying on the cross for us, pleased God more than all sins taken together displeased Him; so the Savior is more powerful to save us than the enemy of good is to destroy us. With this meaning, Christ said: "Fear ye not them that kill the body and are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him that can destroy both soul and body in hell."⁸⁴¹ Unless we open the door of our hearts to him, the enemy of good cannot penetrate into the sanctuary of our will, whereas God is closer to us than we are to ourselves and can lead us strongly and sweetly to the most profound and elevated meritorious free acts, to acts that are the prelude of eternal life.

The Predominant Fault

After treating of the principal sins to be avoided and of their roots and consequences to be mortified, it is fitting that we discuss in a special way the predominant fault that exists in each of us. That we may proceed with order, we must first see in what this fault consists, then how to recognize or discern it, and lastly how to combat it.

DEFINITION OF THE PREDOMINANT FAULT

The predominant fault is the defect in us that tends to prevail over the others, and thereby over our manner of feeling, judging, sympathizing, willing, and acting. It is a defect that has in each of us an intimate relation to our individual temperament.⁸⁴² There are temperaments inclined to effeminacy, indolence, sloth, gluttony, and sensuality. Others are inclined especially to anger and pride. We do not all climb the same slope toward the summit of perfection: those who are effeminate by temperament must by prayer, grace, and virtue become strong; and those who are naturally strong, to the point of easily becoming severe, must, by working at themselves and by grace, become gentle.

Before this progressive transformation of our temperament, the predominant defect in the soul often makes itself felt. It is our domestic enemy, dwelling in our interior; for, if it develops, it may succeed in completely ruining the work of grace or the interior life. At times it is like a crack in a wall that seems to be solid but is not so; like a crevice, imperceptible at times but deep, in the beautiful facade of a building, which a vigorous jolt may shake to the foundations. For example, an antipathy, an instinctive aversion to someone, may, if it is not watched over and corrected by right reason, the spirit of faith, and charity, produce disasters in the soul and lead it to grave injustice. By yielding to such an antipathy, it does itself far more harm than it does its neighbor, for it is much more harmful to commit injustice than to be the object of it.

The predominant fault is so much the more dangerous as it often compromises our principal good point, which is a happy inclination of our nature that ought to develop and to be increased by grace. For example, a man is naturally inclined to gentleness; but if by reason of his predominant fault, which may be effeminacy, his gentleness degenerates into weakness, into excessive indulgence, he may even reach the complete loss of energy. Another, on the contrary, is naturally inclined to fortitude, but if he gives free rein to his irascible temperament, fortitude in him degenerates into unreasonable violence, the cause of every type of disorder.

In every man there is a mixture of good and bad inclinations; there is a predominant fault and also a natural quality. If we are in the state of grace, we have a special attraction of grace, which generally perfects first of all what is best in our nature, and then radiates over that which is less good. Some are thus more inclined toward contemplation, others toward action. Particular care must be taken that the predominant fault does not snuff out our principal natural quality or our special attraction of grace. Otherwise our soul would resemble a field of wheat invaded by tares or cockle, of which the Gospel speaks. And we have an adversary, the devil, who seeks to foster the growth of our predominant fault that he may place us in conflict with those who work with us in the Lord's field. Christ Himself tells us: "The kingdom of heaven is likened to a man that sowed good seed in his field. But while men were asleep, his enemy came and oversowed cockle among the wheat and went his way."⁸⁴³

Christ explains that the enemy is the devil,⁸⁴⁴ who seeks to destroy the work of God by creating disunion among those who, in a holy manner, ought to collaborate in the same work for eternity. He is skillful in exaggerating in our eyes the defects of our neighbor, in transforming a grain of sand into a mountain, in setting up, as it were, a magnifying glass in our imagination, that we may become irritated at our brethren instead of working with them. Considering all this, we can see what evil may spring up in each of us from our principal fault if we are not most attentive to it. At times it is like a devouring worm in a beautiful fruit.

HOW TO RECOGNIZE THE PREDOMINANT FAULT

Evidently it is of primary importance that we recognize our predominant fault and have no illusions about it. This is so much the more necessary as our adversary, the enemy of our soul, knows it quite well and makes use of it to stir up trouble in and about us. In the citadel of our interior life, which is defended by the different virtues, the predominant fault is the weak spot, undefended by the theological and moral virtues. The enemy of souls seeks exactly this easily vulnerable point in each one, and he finds it without difficulty. Therefore, we must recognize it also.

But how can we discern it? For beginners who are sincere, this is quite easy. But later the predominant fault is less apparent,

for it tries to hide itself and to put on the appearances of a virtue: pride clothes itself in the outward appearances of magnanimity, and pusillanimity seeks to cover itself with those of humility. Yet we must succeed in discerning the predominant fault, for if we do not know it, we cannot fight it; and if we do not fight it, we have no true interior life.

That we may discern it, we must first of all ask God for light: “Lord, make me know the obstacles I more or less consciously place in the way of the working of Thy grace in me. Then give me the strength to rid myself of them, and, if I am negligent in doing so, do Thou deign to free me from them, though I should suffer greatly.”

After thus asking sincerely for light, we must make a serious examination. How? By asking ourselves: “Toward what do my most ordinary preoccupations tend, in the morning when I awake, or when I am alone? Where do my thoughts and desires go spontaneously?” We should keep in mind that the predominant fault, which easily commands all our passions, takes on the appearance of a virtue and, if it is not opposed, it may lead to impenitence. Judas fell into impenitence through avarice, which he did not will to dominate; it led him to impenitence like a violent wind that hurls a ship on the rocks.

A second step in discerning the predominant fault, is to ask ourselves: “What is generally the cause or source of my sadness and joy? What is the general motive of my actions, the ordinary origin of my sins, especially when it is not a question of an accidental sin, but rather a succession of sins or a state of resistance to grace, notably when this resistance persists for several days and leads me to omit my exercises of piety?” Then we must seek sincerely to know the motive of the soul’s refusal to return to the good.

In addition, we must ask ourselves: “What does my director think of this? In his opinion, what is my predominant fault? He is a better judge than I am.” No one, in fact, is a good judge in his own case; here self-love deceives us. Often our director has discovered this fault before we have; perhaps he has tried more than once to talk to us about it. Have we not sought to excuse ourselves? Excuses come promptly, for the predominant fault easily excites all our passions: it commands them as a master, and they obey instantly. Thus, wounded self-love immediately excites irony, anger, impatience. Moreover, when the predominant fault has taken root in us, it experiences a particular repugnance to being unmasked and fought, because it wishes to reign in us. This condition sometimes reaches such a point that, when our neighbor accuses us of this fault, we reply that we have many bad habits, but truly not the one mentioned.”⁸⁴⁵

The predominant fault may also be recognized by the temptations that our enemy arouses most frequently in us, for he attacks us especially through this weak point in our soul.

Lastly, in moments of true fervor the inspirations of the Holy Ghost ask us for the sacrifice of this particular fault.

If we have sincere recourse to these different means of discernment, it will not be too difficult for us to recognize this interior enemy which we bear within ourselves and which enslaves us: “Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin,”⁸⁴⁶ says our Lord.

It is like an interior prison that we bear about with us wherever we go. We must earnestly aspire to deliverance.

It would be a great grace for us if we were to meet a saint who would say: “This is your predominant fault and this your principal attraction of grace which you must follow generously to reach union with God.” In this way Christ applied the name, “sons of thunder” (Boanerges)⁸⁴⁷ to the young apostles James and John who wished to call down fire from heaven on a city that had refused to receive them. We read in St. Luke: “He rebuked them, saying: You know not of what spirit you are. The Son of man came not to destroy souls, but to save.”⁸⁴⁸ In the school of the Savior, the Boanerges became such gentle souls that toward the end of his life St. John the Evangelist could say only one thing: “My little children,... love one another.”⁸⁴⁹ When asked why he always repeated the same exhortation, he used to reply: “This is His commandment.... And he that keepeth His commandments, abideth in Him and He in him.” John had lost nothing of his ardor, of his thirst for justice, but it had become spiritualized and was accompanied by a great gentleness.

HOW TO COMBAT THE PREDOMINANT FAULT

Because the predominant fault is our principal interior enemy, we must combat it. When it is conquered, temptations are no longer very dangerous, but are rather occasions of progress.

The predominant fault is not conquered, however, as long as there is no true progress in piety or the interior life, as long as the soul has not attained to a true and stable fervor of will; in other words, to that promptness of the will in the service of God which is, according to St. Thomas, the essence of true devotion.⁸⁵⁰ In this spiritual warfare, we must have recourse to three principal means: prayer, examination of conscience, and a sanction.

Our prayer must be sincere: “Lord, show me the principal obstacle to my sanctification, the one that hinders me from profiting by graces and also by the exterior difficulties that would work to the good of my soul if I had greater recourse to Thee when they arise.” The saints went so far as to say, as St. Louis Bertrand did: “Lord, here burn, here cut, and dry up in me all that hinders me from going to Thee, that Thou mayest spare me in eternity.” Blessed Nicholas of Flue used to pray: “Lord, take from me everything that hinders me from going to Thee. Give me all that will lead me to Thee. Take me from myself and give

me to Thyself.”

This prayer does not dispense us from self-examination; on the contrary, it leads to it. And, as St. Ignatius says, it is especially suitable for beginners to write down each week the number of times they have yielded to their predominant fault which seeks to reign in them like a despot. It is easier to laugh fruitlessly at this method than to apply it fruitfully. If we keep track of the money we spend and receive, it is still more useful to know what we lose and what we gain from the spiritual point of view for eternity.

It is also highly proper to impose a sanction, or penance, on ourselves each time we fall into this defect. This penance may take the form of a prayer, a moment of silence, an exterior or an interior mortification. It makes reparation for the fault and satisfaction for the penalty due it. At the same time we acquire more circumspection for the future. Thus many persons have cured themselves of the habit of cursing by imposing on themselves the obligation of giving an alms in reparation each time they fail.

Before conquering our predominant fault, our virtues are often, to speak more properly, natural good inclinations rather than true and solid virtues that have taken root in us. Prior to victory over this fault, the fountain of graces is not yet adequately opened on our soul, for we still seek ourselves too much and do not live sufficiently for God.

In addition, we must overcome pusillanimity, which leads us to think that our predominant fault cannot be eradicated. With grace we can overcome it, because, as the Council of Trent says, quoting St. Augustine: “God never commands the impossible; but in giving us His precepts, He commands us to do what we can, and to ask for the grace to accomplish what we cannot do.”⁸⁵¹

It has been said that the spiritual combat is in this case more necessary than victory, for, if we dispense ourselves from this struggle, we abandon the interior life, we no longer tend toward perfection. We must not make peace with our faults.

Moreover, credence must not be given to our adversary when he seeks to persuade us that this struggle is suitable only for the saints that they may reach the highest regions of spirituality. The truth is that without this persevering and efficacious struggle we cannot sincerely aspire to Christian perfection, toward which the supreme precept makes it a duty for all of us to tend. This precept is, in fact, without limit: “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart and with thy whole soul and with all thy strength and with all thy mind: and thy neighbor as thyself.”⁸⁵²

Without this struggle, there is no interior joy or peace, for the tranquility of order or peace comes from the spirit of sacrifice. It alone establishes us interiorly in order by putting to death all that is inordinate in us.⁸⁵³

Lastly, charity, the love of God and of souls in God, finally prevails completely over the predominant fault; it then truly occupies the first place in our soul and reigns there effectively. Mortification, which makes our principal fault disappear, delivers us and assures the predominance in our soul of our true natural qualities and of our special attraction of grace. Thus little by little, we grow to be ourselves, in the broad sense of the word, that is, to be supernaturally ourselves minus our defects. We do not have to copy in a more or less servile manner another’s qualities, or enter a uniform mold that is the same for all. There is a great variety in human personalities, just as no two leaves or flowers are perfectly similar. But a person’s temperament must not be crushed; it must be transformed while keeping whatever is good in it. In our temperament, our character must be the imprint of the acquired and infused virtues, especially of the theological virtues. Then, instead of instinctively referring everything to self, as is the case when the predominant fault reigns, we will turn everything back to God, think almost continually of Him, and live for Him alone; at the same time we will lead to Him those with whom we come into contact.

NOTE

That we may know ourselves better, we should vary the examination of conscience, making it at times according to the order of the commandments of God and the precepts of the Church; at other times, following the order of the moral and theological virtues; or considering the sins opposed to these different virtues, indicated in the two following outlines:

Inordinate love of self	Pride	in regard to self	Vain glory, from which come: disobedience, boasting, hypocrisy, contention through rivalry, discord, singularity, stubbornness. Acedia (sloth), hatred of spiritual things, whence are born: malice, rancor, pusillanimity, discouragement, spiritual torpor, forgetfulness of the precepts, seeking after forbidden things.
		in regard to one's neighbour	Envy, from which spring: hatred, detraction, regard calumny, joy at the misfortune of another, to sadness at his success. Anger, whence come: disputes, fits of passion, , insults, contumely, blasphemy.
	Concupiscence	of the eye's	Avarice, whence proceed: perfidy, fraud, deceit, perjury, itch to acquire and excessive anxiety to keep, harshness, hardness of heart.
		of the flesh	Gluttony, which engenders: improper jokes, buffoonery, impurity, foolish conversation, stupidity. Lust, whence proceed: spiritual blindness, poor judgment, impetuosity (of decision), inconstancy, love of self even to hatred of God, attachment to the present life which destroys hope of eternal life.

			Contrary Vices
Virtues	Theological	Charity	toward God and the gift of wisdom disgust for spiritual things towards one's neighbour and mercy envy, discord, scandal
		Hope	confidence, abandonment, and the gift of fear, opposed to presumption presumption despair
		Faith	and the spirit of faith, and the gifts of understanding and knowledge infidelity, blasphemy, blindness, culpable ignorance
	Cardinal	Prudence	docility to good counsels and the gift of counsel imprudence and negligence, carnal prudence, cunning
		Justice	and the connected virtues of religion (gift of piety), penance, filial piety, obedience, gratitude, veracity, fidelity, liberality injustice, impiety, superstition, hypocrisy, lying
		Fortitude	and the gift of fortitude, with magnanimity, patience and perseverance rash boldness, cowardliness, and pusillanimity
		Temperance	sobriety and chastity, with meekness and humility intemperance, lust, anger, pride and curiosity

Passions to be Regulated

There can be no interior life without a struggle against self in order to regulate and discipline the passions, to cause the light of right reason and even that of infused faith and of Christian prudence to descend into these movements of the sensible appetites. There is far more than we think in the expression, to discipline one's sensible appetite; it should receive discipline like a docile pupil who is being trained. Consequently it is fitting that we speak of the passions. To proceed in an orderly fashion, we must consider them from the psychological, the moral, and the essentially ascetical point of view. We shall follow the teaching of St. Thomas.⁸⁵⁴

THE PASSIONS FROM THE PSYCHOLOGICAL POINT OF VIEW

St. Thomas, who follows Aristotle and St. John Damascene, defines passion thus: "A movement of the sensitive appetite when we imagine good or evil.... A passion is properly to be found where there is corporeal transmutation."⁸⁵⁵

When we say that it is a movement of the sensible appetite, common to man and animal, a distinction is made between passion and a movement of the spiritual will, called the rational appetite. Neither must the movement of the sensible appetite be confused with corporeal movements: for example, with the beating of the heart that follows it. These movements of the sensitive appetite which are the passions manifestly exist in the animal: for example, when it desires its food, and in it passion is now under a mild form, as in the dove or the lamb, now under a violent form, as in the wolf, the tiger, or the lion.

Following Aristotle, St. Thomas distinguishes and classifies the different passions in a remarkable manner. He distinguishes first of all the concupiscible appetite, which inclines one to seek for sensible and delectable good and to flee injurious evil, and the irascible appetite, which inclines one to resist obstacles and, in spite of them, to obtain a difficult good. There are animals and men dominated by the irascible appetite, others dominated by the concupiscible.

In the concupiscible appetite, in regard to sensible good which attracts, three passions are distinguished: the love of this sensible good, whether it is present or absent; the desire of this good, if it is absent; the joy, if it is present. These movements of the sensible appetite are seen in the animal to which food is brought or from which it is removed.

On the contrary, in reference to evil to be avoided, we distinguish in the concupiscible, hatred, aversion, and sadness. Thus the lamb instinctively flees from the wolf.

In the irascible appetite, in reference to the good difficult to obtain (*bonum arduum*), there are the two passions of hope and of despair or dejection, according as this good appears obtainable or unobtainable. And in this same appetite, with regard to injurious evil to be repulsed, there is audacity and fear, according as this evil is easy or difficult to repulse, and also anger, if it is a question of a present evil to be surmounted or an insult to be avenged.

In the spiritual will there are analogous movements of love, desire, joy, hope, and so on, but these are of an immaterial order, whereas the passion is always accompanied by a movement of the organism, because of the fact that the sensible appetite is united to an organ.

Among all the passions, the first of all, presupposed by all the others, is sensible love: for example, in the animal, love of the food that it needs. From this love are born desire, joy, hope, audacity, or hatred of what is contrary, aversion, sadness, despair, fear, anger.⁸⁵⁶

From what we have said, it is evident that passion, as it has been defined, is not always lively, vehement, and dominant. However, many modern authors apply the term "passion" to a particularly intense movement of the sensible appetite and reserve "emotion" to others that are less strong.

PASSION FROM THE MORAL POINT OF VIEW

From the moral point of view, the passions have been widely discussed. The partisans of the morality of pleasure have said that all passions are good, as the legitimate expansion of our nature. This justification of the passions is found among both ancient and modern writers.

The Stoics, on the contrary, condemned the passions, saying that they are a movement which, opposed to right reason, troubles the soul. According to them, the wise man must suppress the passions and reach impassibility.

Aristotle, followed by St. Thomas, states more profoundly that the passions or emotions, considered as such, are morally neither good nor bad, but become morally good if they are aroused or regulated by right reason and the will which utilizes them

as powers, or they become morally bad if they are not conformable to right reason. Their morality depends on the intention of the will, which is always either good or bad, according as it bears or does not bear on a worthy end. Thus, anger may be holy or, on the contrary, unreasonable. Christ willed to show holy indignation when driving the vendors from the Temple and overturning their tables.⁸⁵⁷ Likewise, in Gethsemane Christ, who was about to expiate all our sins, willed to be sorrowful even unto death to make us understand the sorrow we should have for our own sins.

Therefore, if the passions or emotions are regulated, moderated by right reason, they are morally good; they are forces to be used in the service of virtue: for example, courage, which is a virtue, makes use of hope and audacity while moderating them. Likewise modesty, which is a laudable emotion, helps the virtue of chastity, and that other emotion, known as sensible pity toward the unfortunate, renders easy for us the exercise of the virtue of mercy. The act of virtue, St. Thomas says,⁸⁵⁸ is even more meritorious when it makes good use of the passions in view of a virtuous end.

It is clear, in fact, that God has given us our sensible appetites, as He has given us our exterior senses and imagination, as He has given us our two arms, that we may use them in view of a moral good. Thus utilized, the passions when well regulated are powers. And whereas the so-called antecedent passion, which precedes judgment, clouds the reason, as happens in the fanatic or the sectarian, the so-called consequent passion, which follows the judgment of right reason illumined by faith, increases merit and shows the power of good will for a great cause. With this meaning, Pascal could say: "Nothing great is accomplished without passion," without this flame of sensibility, which is like the radiation of zeal or the ardor of love of God and of neighbor. This zeal consumed the hearts of the saints and showed itself in their courage and endurance.

But the inordinate or undisciplined passions become vices because of their inordinateness: sensible love becomes gluttony or luxury; aversion becomes jealousy, envy; audacity becomes temerity; fear becomes cowardliness or pusillanimity.

When these inordinate passions precede the judgment of reason, they trouble it and can diminish responsibility, merit, and demerit; when they follow judgment and are willed, they increase the malice of the act.⁸⁵⁹ Then instead of being powers in the service of goodness, they are in the service of perversity. Whereas in the souls of the saints, of missionaries, and of martyrs, a perfectly ordered passion is a power that manifests and serves the love of God and neighbor; in the soul of a criminal, it manifests and serves unbridled self-love.

THE PASSIONS FROM THE ASCETICAL POINT OF VIEW

According to the principles we have just recalled, we shall consider the passions from the ascetical point of view in their relation to the interior life. From these principles it follows that the passions, being in themselves neither good nor bad, ought not to be extirpated like vices, but should be moderated, regulated; properly speaking, they should be disciplined by right reason illumined by faith. If they are immoderate, they become the roots of vices; if they are disciplined, they are placed at the service of the virtues. A man must not be inert and, as it were, made of straw, nor should he be violent and irascible.

Little by little the light of reason and the superior light of infused faith must descend into our sensible appetites that they may not be like those of an animal without reason, but those of a rational being, of a child of God, who shares in the intimate life of the Most High.

We should direct our thoughts to Christ's sensible appetites, which were pure and strong because of the virtues of virginity, patience, and constancy even to the death of the cross.⁸⁶⁰ Let us also think of the sensibility of Mary, Virgin most pure and Mother of Sorrows, coredemptrix of the human race. We shall thus see how our sensible appetites ought to be ever more and more subjected to our intellect illumined by faith, to our will vivified by charity, and how the light and living flame of the spirit ought to radiate over our emotions to sanctify them and place them at the service of God and of our neighbor. St. Paul exhorts us, saying: "Rejoice with them that rejoice; weep with them that weep."⁸⁶¹ This is characteristic of the saints; they manifest admirable delicacy of feeling for the afflicted; at times they alone can find words which uplift and fortify.

From this point of view, the passions must be moderated, not materially but proportionately to what reason requires in relation to a more or less lofty given end to be reached in given circumstances. Thus, without sinning, a person may experience great sadness, great fear, or lively indignation in certain grave circumstances. We read in Exodus II that Moses, seeing the Israelites adoring the golden calf, crushed this idol to dust and punished with great severity those who were most guilty.⁸⁶² In the First Book of Kings,⁸⁶³ the priest Heli is reprimanded for not having become indignant at the evil conduct of his sons. On the road to perfection, those who are naturally meek must become strong, and those who are naturally inclined to be strong-willed must become gentle. Both are climbing toward the summit by different slopes.

To drive a horse well, now the bit must be used, and now the whip; the same applies to the governing of the passions. At times they must be checked, and at other times awakened, jolted, in order to react against sloth, inertia, timidity, or fear. At times a great effort is required to break an impetuous horse; the same is true of disciplining certain temperaments capable of great things. How beautiful it is to see these temperaments transformed by the profound impress of a Christian character after ten or fifteen years of self-discipline!

With a view to the interior life, one must be particularly attentive, above all at the beginning, to a special point: that is, to be on guard against precipitation and also against the dominant passion, that it may not become a predominant fault. As we have already spoken of the predominant fault, we here insist on precipitation to be avoided or, as the expression goes, on impulsiveness, which inclines one to act without sufficient reflection.

With rash haste many beginners, otherwise very good, at times wish to make too rapid progress, more rapid than their degree of grace warrants. They desire to travel rapidly because of a certain unconscious presumption; then, when trial comes, they sometimes let themselves be cast down at least for a moment. This condition is similar to what happens also in young students at the beginning of their curiosity in their work; when it is satisfied or when application becomes too painful, negligence and sloth follow. As a matter of fact, the happy medium of virtue, which is at the same time a summit above two opposing vices, like strength above temerity and cowardliness, is not attained immediately.

Properly speaking, what is precipitation? St. Thomas⁸⁶⁴ defines it as a manner of acting by impulsion of the will or of the passion, without prudence, precaution, or sufficient consideration. It is a sin directly opposed to prudence and the gift of counsel. It leads to temerity in judgment and is comparable to the haste of one who descends a staircase too rapidly and falls, instead of walking composedly.

From the moral point of view, one should descend in a thoughtful manner from reason, which determines the end to be attained, to the operations to be accomplished without neglecting the steps that intervene, that is, the memory of things past, intelligent attention to present circumstances, shrewdness in foreseeing obstacles that may arise, docility in following authorized advice. One must take time to deliberate before acting; “one should deliberate slowly and without haste,” as Aristotle used to say. Afterward one must sometimes act with great promptness.

If, on the contrary, a person is inclined to action by the impulse of the will or of the passion, while neglecting the intervening steps we have just mentioned, the memory of the past, attention to the present, foresight of the future, and docility, such a person stumbles and falls. This is inevitable.

What are the causes of precipitation? As spiritual writers say, this defect comes from the fact that we substitute our own natural activity for the divine action. We act with feverish ardor, without sufficient reflection, without prayer for the light of the Holy Ghost, without the advice of our spiritual director. At times this natural haste is the cause of extremely imprudent acts that are very harmful in their results.

Natural haste often arises from the fact that we consider only the proximate end to be attained today, without seeing its relation to the supreme end toward which we must direct our steps. Seeing only this immediate human end, we direct our efforts toward it by natural activity, without sufficient recourse to the help of God.

We can see in the training that Christ gave His apostles how often He warned them against this precipitation or natural haste, which causes a man to act without sufficient reflection and without a sufficiently great spirit of faith. Some pages back, we recalled that James and John on returning from their first apostolate, during which a town refused to receive their preaching, asked our Lord to send fire from heaven on this village. With divine irony, Christ then called them Boanerges,⁸⁶⁵ or “sons of thunder,” to remind them that they should be sons of God and, like Him, should also be patient in awaiting the return of sinners. James and John understood; so well indeed, that John at the end of his life could only say: “Love one another, this is the commandment of the Lord.” In Christ’s school, the Boanerges become gentle; yet they do not lose their ardor or their zeal, but this zeal becomes patient, gentle, and less fiery, and bears lasting fruits, the fruits of eternity.

We would do well also to remember how St. Peter, who was called to a high degree of sanctity, was cured of his rash haste and presumption. When our Lord announced His passion, Peter said to Him: “Although all shall be scandalized in Thee, I will never be scandalized. Jesus said to him: Amen I say to thee, that in this night before the cock crow, thou wilt deny Me thrice.”⁸⁶⁶ Humbled by his sin, Peter was cured of his presumption. He no longer counted on himself, but on divine grace by asking to be faithful to it; and grace led him to the very heights of sanctity by the way of martyrdom.

The precipitation we are speaking of sometimes leads young, generous, and ardent souls to wish to reach the summit of perfection more rapidly than grace, without any delay en route, without taking into consideration the intermediary degrees and the mortification necessary for disciplining the passions, as if they had already reached divine union. They sometimes read works on mysticism with avidity and curiosity, and gather from them beautiful flowers before fruit has time to form. They thus expose themselves to many illusions and, when disillusionment comes, they expose themselves to the danger of falling into spiritual sloth and pusillanimity. We should walk at a good pace, indeed with an ever firmer and more rapid step in proportion as we draw near to God who attracts us the more, but we must avoid what St. Augustine calls “great strides off the right road.”

The effects of this haste and of the self-satisfaction that accompany it, are the loss of interior recollection, perturbation, and fruitless agitation, which has only the outward appearances of productive action, as glass beads counterfeit diamonds.

The remedies for precipitation are easily indicated. Since this defect comes from the fact that we substitute our natural, hasty action for that of God, the chief remedy is to be found in a complete dependence in regard to God and in the conformity of our will to His. For this, we must reflect seriously before acting; pray humbly for the light of the Holy Ghost, and also heed the

advice of our spiritual director, who has the grace of state to guide us. Then gradually precipitation will be replaced by habitual docility to the action of God in us. We shall be a little less satisfied with ourselves, and we shall find greater peace and, from time to time, true joy in God.

To discipline the passions, we must be alert to combat vivacity of temperament united to presumption, which springs from too great esteem of self; we must also contend against effeminacy, and against sloth, which would be even more harmful to the interior life. By this slow persevering work, on which we should daily examine ourselves, the ardent, the Boanerges, must become meek without losing true spiritual ardor, which is zeal for the glory of God and the salvation of souls. And the meek also, who are perhaps inclined by nature to effeminacy, heedlessness, and negligence, must become strong. Both will thus ascend by different slopes toward the summit of perfection. And they will see that it is a great thing to know how to discipline themselves gradually, to conduct themselves well, or to put it better, to know how to remain habitually faithful to grace, without which, in the order of salvation, we can do nothing.

Then the passions, no longer inordinate but disciplined, will become powers truly useful for the good of our soul and that of others. Audacity will be at the service of a fortitude that will dominate thoughtless fear when, for example, there is a question of coming promptly to the help of our neighbor in distress. Likewise meekness, which presupposes a great mastery over self, will repress anger so that it may never be anything but the holy indignation of zeal, of a zeal which, without losing any of its ardor, remains patient and meek and is the sign of sanctity.

The Active Purification of the Senses or of the Sensible Appetites

“If thy right hand scandalize thee, cut it off, and cast it from thee.” Matt. 5: 29

Now that we have discussed the sins to be avoided, their consequences to be mortified, and the passions to be disciplined, we must treat of the active purification of the senses and of the sensible appetites, then of that of the intellect and the will. We shall then speak of the purification of the soul through the sacraments and prayer, and finally of the passive purification of the senses, which, according to St. John of the Cross, is at the threshold of the illuminative way.

THE PRINCIPLES TO BE APPLIED

When we treated⁸⁶⁷ of mortification in general according to the Gospel and St. Paul, we saw that it is imposed on us for four principal motives: (1) because of the consequences of original sin, especially of concupiscence; (2) because of the effects of our personal sins; (3) because of the infinite elevation of our supernatural end (God seen as He sees Himself), which demands a subjection not only of the senses to reason, but of reason to the spirit of faith and to charity; (4) finally, because of the necessity of carrying the cross in order to follow Christ who died for us.

We must now apply these principles and see, first of all, what the mortification or active purification of the senses and of the sensible appetites should be.

St. Thomas treats this subject at length when he discusses the passions in general and in particular, also the seven capital sins and their results, and finally when he speaks of the virtues that have their seat in the sensible appetites, such as temperance, chastity, fortitude, patience, meekness, and so on.

Among the great masters of the spiritual life, St. John of the Cross deals with this same subject in *The Ascent of Mount Carmel*⁸⁶⁸ and at the beginning of *The Dark Night*⁸⁶⁹ where he discusses the faults of beginners, or the seven capital sins transposed into the spiritual order: spiritual pride, spiritual gluttony, spiritual sloth, and so on.

Here we should recall the necessity of observing the precepts, especially the supreme precepts of love of God and of our neighbor, consequently of avoiding every mortal sin, and also of guarding ourselves better against our more or less deliberate venial sins. Although a man cannot, without a very special help which the Blessed Virgin received, continually avoid all venial sins taken together, he can avoid each one of them in particular. He should also strive more and more to suppress imperfection, which is a lesser good, an act of a lesser degree of generosity in the service of God. The lesser good is not an evil; but, in the order of good, one should not stop at the lowest rung of the ladder, at the least degree of light and warmth. The happy medium of the acquired virtue of temperance, described by Aristotle, is doubtless already a good, but we should aspire higher, that is, to the happy mean of infused temperance, which, moreover, rises in proportion to the growth of this virtue, united to that of penance, especially when the gifts of the Holy Spirit, like that of fear, incline us to greater generosity in order the better to overcome ourselves and advance more rapidly.⁸⁷⁰ Besides, there are still many degrees in this greater generosity, according, for example, as one ascends toward the summit of perfection by the winding road, which is easier, or by the straight road traced by St. John of the Cross, which reaches its goal more rapidly and leads higher.⁸⁷¹

To avoid sin and imperfection, we must remember here that the capital sins dispose to others, which are often more serious, as vainglory does to disobedience, anger to blasphemy, avarice to hardness, gluttony to impurity, luxury to the hatred of God. We could never beg God too fervently for light to see the gravity of sin and to have a greater contrition for our faults. With fraternal charity, it is one of the greatest signs of spiritual progress.

We must also remember that venial sin, especially if it is repeated, disposes to mortal sin; for he who easily commits venial sin loses purity of intention, and if the occasion presents itself, he may sin mortally. Venial sin is thus on a dangerous slope, like a wall which hinders us from reaching union with God. On the road of perfection, he who does not advance, falls back.

Likewise imperfection, or an act not wholly generous, disposes us to venial sin. Acts that do not measure up to our degree of charity and of the other virtues (*actus remissi*), although they may still be meritorious, indirectly dispose us to redescend, for they do not exclude as much as they ought the inordinate inclinations which may cause us to fall. We shall discuss especially the mortification of sensuality and of anger.

THE MORTIFICATION OF SENSUALITY

We shall begin our consideration of this topic by recalling Christ's exhortation: “If thy right eye scandalize thee, pluck it out

and cast it from thee. For it is expedient for thee that one of thy members should perish, rather than that thy whole body be cast into hell.”⁸⁷² Christian morality explains this text when, on the subject of the sixth commandment, it teaches that outside of marriage, carnal delectation directly willed with full deliberation is a mortal sin. In this case there is no light matter. Why? Because such direct consent disposes one proximately to a sin that is still more grave; it is like inserting a finger into a gear where the whole arm will be caught. Here one is faced with avoiding a capital sin which leads to inconsiderateness, inconstancy, blindness of spirit, love of self even to hatred of God, and to despair.⁸⁷³

Therefore St. Paul strongly recalls the necessity of this mortification, of which he gives an example when he writes: “I chastise my body and bring it into subjection: lest perhaps, when I have preached to others, I myself should become a castaway.”⁸⁷⁴ The consideration here is the mortification of the senses and of the body in order to assure the liberty of the spirit, and in order that the body may not weigh down the soul, but allow it to follow a higher life.⁸⁷⁵

St. Thomas⁸⁷⁶ teaches that lust is avoided rather by flight from the occasions than by direct resistance, which makes one think too much of the thing to be fought against. On the contrary, acedia, or spiritual sloth, is overcome rather by resistance, for, in order to resist it, we think of spiritual goods, and the more we think of them, the more they attract us.

We should also seek to avoid as far as possible even indirectly voluntary movements of sensuality, especially when there is proximate danger of consent. It is thus expedient for a number of people to avoid certain reading (works on medicine, for example) which might become dangerous for them because of their frailty, especially if they read through curiosity and not through a duty of state.⁸⁷⁷

From this point of view, we must also watch over certain affections which may become too sensible and even sensual. The author of *The Imitation*⁸⁷⁸ tells us that we must avoid excessive familiarity with persons in order to enjoy our Lord’s, and that certain affections which are too lively and too sensible cause us to lose peace of heart. St. Teresa says also in *The Way of Perfection*⁸⁷⁹ that certain particular friendships are plagues which little by little make the soul lose fervor, then regularity, and which sometimes give rise to the most profound divisions in communities and compromise salvation.⁸⁸⁰

At this point the mortification of the heart is no less necessary than that of the body and the senses.

Finally, care must be taken not to seek sensible consolations for their own sake in prayer through a sort of spiritual gluttony.⁸⁸¹ He who loves God not for Himself, but for the sensible consolations he receives or expects, is not in order. He loves himself first and God in the second place, as a person loves a product inferior to himself. This is an inverted order and, consequently, a more or less conscious perversion. By putting self first, one misuses what is most holy and exposes oneself to all temptations.

Spiritual enjoyments, sought for themselves, will awaken the passions dormant in our heart of flesh, and, instead of taking the road that the saints have followed, we slip insensibly down the slope along which the false mystics, especially the quietists, let themselves be drawn. *Corruptio optimi pessima*, the worst corruption is that which attacks what is best in us, that is, the love of God, in order to disfigure and pervert it. There is nothing higher on earth than true mysticism, which is the eminent exercise of the loftiest virtue, charity, and of the gifts of the Holy Ghost which accompany it; on the other hand, there is nothing worse than false mysticism, than the false love of God and of our neighbor, which is true only in name and which resembles true mysticism as an imitation diamond does a real one.⁸⁸² St. John tells us: “Dearly beloved, believe not every spirit; but try the spirits if they be of God.”⁸⁸³

To avoid illusion, we need humility and purity of heart here. We may even say that all Christ’s teaching on the mortification of sensuality is summed up in these words: “Blessed are the clean of heart: for they shall see God.”

But the Gospel insists strongly on another mortification, that of the irascible appetite, the other form of the inordinateness of the sensibility, which is divided, as we have seen, into the concupiscible appetite and the irascible appetite.

THE MORTIFICATION OF THE IRASCIBLE APPETITE

We read in the Sermon on the Mount: “You have heard that it was said to them of old: Thou shalt not kill.... But I say to you, that whosoever is angry with his brother shall be in danger of the judgment.... If therefore thou offer thy gift at the altar, and there thou remember that thy brother hath anything against thee; leave there thy offering before the altar, and go first to be reconciled to thy brother; and then coming thou shalt offer thy gift. Be at agreement with thy adversary betimes, whilst thou art in the way with him.”⁸⁸⁴

A little farther on, Christ says: “But I say to you not to resist evil: but if one strike thee on thy right cheek, turn to him also the other. And if a man will contend with thee in judgment and take away thy coat, let go thy cloak also unto him.”⁸⁸⁵ Acting thus, the Christian does not sharply defend his rights; he thinks more of his duties than of his rights, and often wins over to God the soul of his irritated brother, whom he calms by his patience and meekness. The saints acted in this way and often won to God the violent who opposed them.

In the same sermon Christ tells us: “Love your enemies: do good to them that hate you: and pray for them that persecute and

calumniate you.... For if you love them that love you, what reward shall you have?... Be you therefore perfect, as also your heavenly Father is perfect.”⁸⁸⁶

And, to be sure, if we truly acted in this way toward our adversaries (even exteriorly, where there are no superior interests to safeguard), we would most certainly reach sanctity, that supernatural perfection which is a participation, not alone of angelic life but of the inner life of God, a perfection which is of the same order as that of our Father in heaven.

To reach it we need the mortification of the irascible appetite which makes us acquire the virtue of meekness, not the effeminacy of temperament or the supineness of those who let everything go because they have no energy or because they are afraid to react, but the virtue of meekness, which is a great power to conquer ourselves, to possess our souls, to keep them calm, in the hand of God, and thus to do true good to those very persons who are irritated at us, to those who are like the broken reed that must not be completely crushed by answering them in the same irritated tone.

This mortification of the irascible appetite is so much the more necessary as the results of anger are more serious; for it leads to other sins, occasionally even to cursing and blasphemy.

On the other hand, meekness is the flower of charity and protects its fruits, for it makes counsels and even reproaches acceptable. A reproach given with great kindness is often well received, whereas when given with sharpness it produces no results. Thus Christ tells us: “Learn of Me, because I am meek and humble of heart.”

At this point it is expedient to say something about the type of anger which is the “bitter zeal” mentioned by spiritual writers, especially St. John of the Cross, when dealing with the defects of beginners.⁸⁸⁷

Some, he says, become impatient as soon as they are deprived of consolations: “For when spiritual things minister to them no more sweetness and delight, they naturally become peevish, and in that bitterness of spirit prove a burden to themselves in all they do: trifles make them angry, and they are at times intolerable to all about them... Their natural temper is soured and rendered morose. They are,” says the saint, “like a babe weaned from the breast.”⁸⁸⁸ They also occasionally fall into spiritual sloth.

Or perhaps “they are angry with other people for their faults, with a sort of unquiet zeal, and watch them; they are occasionally moved to blame them, and even do so in anger, constituting themselves guardians of virtue. All this is contrary to spiritual meekness.” And there is pride involved. They see the mote in their neighbor’s eye and do not see the beam in their own.

“Others, again, seeing their own imperfections, become angry with themselves with an impatience that is not humble. These impatient people show that they expect to be saints in one day.” St. John of the Cross says: “Many of these make many and grand resolutions, but, being self-confident and not humble, the more they resolve, the more they fall, and the more angry they become; not having the patience to wait for God’s time; this is also opposed to spiritual meekness. There is no perfect remedy for this but in the dark night,” or the passive purification of the senses, of which we shall speak farther on.

Finally, the saint remarks: “There are, however, some people who are so patient, and who advance so slowly in their spiritual progress, that God wishes they were not so patient.”

The active purification of the sensible appetites or the mortification that we impose on ourselves must cause this double disorder of sensuality and irritability to disappear; but it cannot completely suppress it. To finish its work, there is needed a more profound purification, that which comes directly from God Himself, when he places the sensibility in a special and prolonged aridity in which He communicates to us a superior light—that of the gift of knowledge, knowledge of the vanity of all earthly things—which is not a sensible grace but an entirely spiritual grace. It is the passive purification of the senses of which we shall speak farther on. This purification is one of the forms of the salutary cross we must carry in order to reach the true life of the spirit, which dominates the senses and unites us to God.

The Active Purification of the Imagination and the Memory

“In all thy works remember thy last end, and thou shalt never sin.” Eccclus. 7:40

What we have said of the active purification of the senses and of the sensible appetites has already demonstrated that exterior mortification is not the most important; yet he who neglects it will also neglect all interior mortification and end by losing completely the spirit of abnegation.

This loss would occur especially if a person deliberately wished no longer to trouble himself about mortification. He would thus fall, as frequently happens, into practical naturalism substituted for the spirit of faith, and finally he would no longer keep practically anything of Christ’s precept: “If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross.”⁸⁸⁹

If anyone deliberately wishes to take as food all that is pleasing and always to be at his ease, without any spirit of Christian temperance, he no longer tends toward perfection and forgets the loftiness of the supreme precept: “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart and with thy whole soul and with all thy strength and with all thy mind.”⁸⁹⁰ A religious who acts in this manner loses sight of the special obligation of the religious life.

But the exterior mortification of the body and senses would be without great result if it were not accompanied by the interior mortification of the imagination and the memory, of which we are going to speak, and by the active purification of the intellect and will, which we shall treat of next.

THE ACTIVE PURIFICATION OF THE IMAGINATION

The imagination is a faculty that is undeniably very useful to us, since the soul united to the body cannot think without images; an image always accompanies the idea. This fact explains why Christ spoke to the multitudes in parables, that He might lift them gently from the sensible image to the spiritual idea of the kingdom of God; in like manner, to make the Samaritan woman understand the value of divine grace, He did not tell her about it in abstract terms, but used the figure of the “fountain of water, springing up into life everlasting.”

But, to be useful, the imagination must be directed by right reason illumined by faith; otherwise it may become, as someone has said “the mad woman in the house.” It diverts us from the consideration of divine things and inclines us toward vain, inconsistent, and fantastic, or even forbidden things. At the very least, it leads us to daydreaming that gives rise to sentimentality, which is opposed to true piety.⁸⁹¹

It is not always in our power, especially in periods of fatigue, to dispel at once vain or dangerous images; but, with the help of grace, we can will not to grant them the attention of the mind, and we can gradually diminish their number and their attraction. Even perfect souls continue to suffer certain involuntary ramblings of the imagination aroused occasionally by the devil, as St. Teresa points out in the fifth mansion and even in the sixth.⁸⁹² But, as the interior soul advances, it gradually frees itself from these wanderings of the fancy and ends by contemplating God and His infinite goodness, scarcely paying any attention to the images which accompany this act of penetrating and sweet faith. Thus we write with a pen without noticing its form, and frequently we converse with a person without paying any attention to the shape or color of his garments, unless there is something strange or unusual about them.

Consequently the imagination ceases little by little to trouble the exercise of the intellect, and finally is placed positively at its service that it may occasionally express in beautiful images those things that pertain to the interior life, somewhat as Christ expressed them in parables or in His conversations with Nicodemus or the Samaritan woman. These images ought, therefore, to be unimpassioned and discreet in order to draw attention not to themselves, but to the superior idea which they express. Then, as a well-born person wears a garment that is simple and in good taste without according it any more attention than is necessary, so the thought makes use of the figure without dwelling on it. The image is there only for the thought, and the thought only for the expression of truth.

But such a harmony of our faculties is not realized without true discipline of the imagination in order that it may cease to be the mad woman in the house and may truly be placed at the service of the intellect illumined by faith. In this way alone can we gradually re-establish the order that existed in the state of original justice, in which the superior part of the soul retained the direction of the imagination and the different emotions of the sensibility as long as it obeyed God whom it contemplated and loved above all.

According to these principles, we must brush aside at once dangerous images and memories, put away also useless reading

and vain reveries that would make us lose precious time and might expose us to all sorts of illusions in which the enemy would make sport of us in order to ruin us.

To effect this discipline, we must apply ourselves to the duty of the moment (*age quod agis*) with a healthy realism, directing the accomplishment of this duty to God, who should be loved above all. Thus will our intellect and will gradually dominate our imagination and sensibility; and our obedient imagination will find in the beauties of the liturgy food for our interior life.

St. John of the Cross points out that true devotion is concerned with the spiritual and invisible object, represented by sensible images, without pausing at these, and that the nearer a soul draws to divine union, the less it depends on images.⁸⁹³

However, it is important at this point to speak more particularly of the mortification of the memory, which exposes us to live in the unreal and which only too often recalls to us what ought to be forgotten.

THE ACTIVE PURIFICATION OF THE MEMORY

St. John of the Cross discusses this subject at length.⁸⁹⁴ Here we are concerned at the same time with the sensible memory, which exists in animals, and the intellectual memory that is common to men and angels.⁸⁹⁵ The intellectual memory is not a faculty really distinct from the intellect; it is the intellect in so far as it retains ideas.⁸⁹⁶

Why does our memory need to be purified? Because, since original sin and as a result of our repeated personal sins, it is full of useless and sometimes dangerous memories. In particular, we often recall the wrongs our neighbor has done us, the harsh words for which we have not yet completely pardoned him, although he himself may have keenly regretted them. We remember less the favors we have received from our neighbor than what we have had to suffer from him, and a harsh word often makes us forget all the kindnesses that have come to us from him in the course of several years. But the chief defect of our memory is what Scripture calls the proneness to forget God. Our memory, which is made to recall to us what is most important, often forgets the one thing necessary, which is above time and does not pass.

What St. John of the Cross says⁸⁹⁷ about the necessity of the purification of the memory may seem exaggerated at first reading; but our impression changes if we read first of all what the Scriptures say on the subject.

Scripture often speaks of man's proneness to forget God. Isaiah writes: "Truth hath been forgotten: and he that departed from evil, lay open to be a prey. And the Lord saw, and it appeared evil in His eyes, because there is no judgment."⁸⁹⁸

Jeremias, speaking in the name of God, says: "Will a virgin forget her ornament?... But My people hath forgotten Me days without number."⁸⁹⁹ Recalling the mercies of God in regard to the people of Israel saved by Him in their passage through the Red Sea, the Psalmist writes: "They forgot His works.... They forgot God, who saved them, who had done great things."⁹⁰⁰ Several times Scripture adds that especially in tribulation we should recall the mercies of God and implore His aid.

If we forget God and do not appreciate His immense benefits, those of the redemptive Incarnation, the institution of the Holy Eucharist, daily Mass, we are guilty of ingratitude and lose the time of the present life which ought to tend toward eternal life.

Proneness to forget God causes our memory to be as if immersed in time, whose relation to eternity, to the benefits and promises of God, it no longer sees. This defect inclines our memory to see all things horizontally on the line of time that flees, of which the present alone is real, between the past that is gone and the future that is not yet. Forgetfulness of God prevents us from seeing that the present moment is also on a vertical line which attaches it to the single instant of immobile eternity, and that there is a divine manner of living the present moment in order that by merit it may enter into eternity. Whereas forgetfulness of God leaves us in this banal and horizontal view of things on the line of time which passes, the contemplation of God is like a vertical view of things which pass and of their bond with God who does not pass. To be immersed in time, is to forget the value of time, that is to say, its relation to eternity.

By what virtue must this great defect of forgetfulness of God be cured? St. John of the Cross⁹⁰¹ answers that the memory which forgets God must be healed by the hope of eternal beatitude, as the intellect must be purified by the progress of faith, and the will by the progress of charity.

This doctrine is based on numerous sayings of Holy Scripture relative to the remembrance of the benefits of God and His promises. The Psalmist often says: "In the day of my trouble I sought God.... I remembered the works of the Lord."⁹⁰² "I will be mindful of Thy justice alone."⁹⁰³ "The proud did iniquitously altogether: but I declined not from Thy law. I remembered, O Lord, Thy judgments of old: and I was comforted."⁹⁰⁴ We read in Ecclesiasticus also: "In all thy works remember thy last end, and thou shalt never sin."⁹⁰⁵

Holy Scripture often says also that we must ceaselessly remember the divine promises, which are the foundation of our hope. The patriarchs and prophets of the Old Testament lived by the promise of the Messiah who was to come; and we should live daily more profoundly by the promise of eternal beatitude. It is one of the great recurrent themes in Holy Scripture.

On this point, as on so many others, *The Imitation of Christ* preserves admirably for us the spirit of St. Augustine, often using his very words.⁹⁰⁶ This teaching helps us to understand clearly what St. John of the Cross wrote later. The author of *The Imitation* often treats of the purification of the memory in the passages where he speaks of the forgetfulness of all creatures in

order to find the Creator,⁹⁰⁷ of meditation on death,⁹⁰⁸ of anxiety to be avoided about one's affairs,⁹⁰⁹ of vain and worldly learning,⁹¹⁰ of the remembrance of the benefits of God,⁹¹¹ of liberty of heart, which is acquired by prayer rather than by reading.⁹¹²

We shall quote only the most characteristic passages which show how the purification of the memory prepares the soul for contemplation and union with God.

Of the contempt of everything created in order to find the Creator. For as long as any thing holds me back, I cannot freely fly to Thee.... And what can be more free than he who desires nothing upon earth? A man ought, therefore, to soar above everything created, and perfectly to forsake himself, and in ecstasy of mind to stand and see that Thou, the Creator of all, hast nothing like to Thee among creatures. And unless a man be disengaged from all things created (for their sake or for himself), he cannot freely attend to things divine. And this is the reason why there are found so few contemplative persons, because there are few that know how to sequester themselves entirely from perishable creatures....⁹¹³

Of the thoughts of death. Oh, the dullness and the hardness of the human heart, that dwelleth only upon things present, instead rather of providing for those which are to come! Thou shouldst so order thyself in every deed and thought as if thou wert immediately to die.... Now is the time very precious, now is the acceptable time, now is the day of salvation.... And man's life passeth away suddenly like a shadow.... Whilst thou hast time, amass for thyself immortal riches. Think of nothing but thy salvation; care only for the things of God. Make to thyself friends now, by venerating the saints of God and imitating their actions, that when thou shalt fail in this life they may receive thee into everlasting dwellings. Keep thyself as a pilgrim and a stranger upon earth, that hath no concern with the business of the world. Keep thy heart free and lifted up to God, for thou hast not here a lasting city.⁹¹⁴

We should not settle ourselves on earth; people do not settle themselves on the road, or go to sleep there, but rather use it as a means of advancing toward a given end.

That a man must not be too anxious about his affairs. Son, commit thy cause to Me always; I will dispose of it well in its due season. Await My appointment, and thence thou shalt experience success therefrom....⁹¹⁵

Against vain and worldly learning. Son, let not the beautiful and subtle sayings of men affect thee; for the kingdom of God consisteth not in speech, but in virtue, Attend to My words, which inflame hearts and enlighten minds, which excite to compunction and afford manifold consolations.... When thou shalt have read and shalt know many things, thou must always revert to the one beginning. I am He who teacheth men knowledge, and who giveth a more clear understanding to little ones than can be taught by man. He to whom I speak will quickly be wise and will profit greatly in spirit. Woe to them that inquire after many curious things of men, and are little curious of the way to serve Me. The time will come when Christ, the Master of masters, the Lord of Angels, shall appear to hear the lessons of all men, that is, to examine the conscience of everyone. And then will He search Jerusalem with lamps, and the hidden things of darkness shall be brought to light, and the argument of tongues shall be silent. I am He that in an instant elevateth the humble mind to comprehend more reasons of the eternal truth than if anyone had studied ten years in the schools. I teach without noise of words, without confusion of opinions, without ambition of honor, without strife of arguments. I am He who teacheth to despise earthly things, to loathe things present, to seek the things eternal, to relish the things eternal, to fly honors, to endure scandals, to repose all hope in Me, to desire nothing out of Me, and above all things ardently to love Me.... I within am the Teacher of truth, the Searcher of the heart, the Understander of thoughts, the Mover of actions, distributing to everyone as I judge fitting....⁹¹⁶

Of the remembrance of the manifold benefits of God. Give me to understand Thy will, and to commemorate with great reverence and diligent consideration all Thy benefits, as well in general as in particular, that so henceforward I may be able worthily to return thanks for them.... All things that we have in soul and body... are Thy benefits.... He who hath received greater things, cannot glory of his own merit, nor extol himself above others, nor exult over the lesser.... For Thou, O God, hast chosen the poor and the humble, and those that are despised by this world, for Thy familiar friends and domestics....⁹¹⁷

Of liberty of heart. Lord, this is the work of a perfect man, never to let the mind slacken from attending to heavenly things, and amidst many cares to pass on as it were without care; not after the manner of an indolent person, but by a certain prerogative of a free mind, not cleaving with an inordinate affection to anything created.⁹¹⁸

Here we have truly the purification of the memory, which prepares for the infused contemplation of the great mysteries of faith. On this contemplation of the purified and liberated soul, *The Imitation* says:

For this a great grace is required, such as may elevate the soul, and lift it up above itself. And unless a man be elevated in spirit and freed from attachment to all creatures and wholly united to God, whatever he knows and whatever he has is of no great importance.⁹¹⁹

Is this not equivalent to saying that the infused contemplation of the mysteries of faith and the union with God resulting from it are in the normal way of sanctity? The *Imitation* adds:

Whatsoever is not God is nothing, and ought to be accounted as nothing. There is a great difference between the wisdom of an illuminated and devout man, and the

knowledge of a learned and studious cleric. Far more noble is that learning which flows from above from the divine influence than that which is laboriously acquired by the industry of man. Many are found to desire contemplation, but they are not careful to practice those things which are required for its attainment.... From a pure heart proceedeth the fruit of a good life.^{[920](#)}

This teaching on the purification of the memory was particularly developed by St. John of the Cross, especially in relation to the remembrance of exceptional and so to speak exterior graces on which we must not dwell too much. The memory of them, accompanied by vain complacency, would turn us away from union with God. Hope lifts us up more to the love of God than experience of extraordinary graces. “What we have to do, then,” says the holy doctor, “in order to live in the simple and perfect hope of God, whenever these forms, knowledge, and distinct images occur, is not to fix our minds upon them but to turn immediately to God, emptying the memory of all such matters, in loving affection, without regarding or considering them more than suffices to enable us to understand and perform our obligations, if they have any reference thereto.”^{[921](#)}

Here we have truly the active purification of the memory which is too preoccupied with useless or dangerous memories. We should put this teaching into practice that our memory may no longer be, so to speak, immersed in ephemeral things, that it may no longer see them only on the horizontal line of fleeting time, but on the vertical line which attaches them to the single instant of immobile eternity.

Thus, little by little the soul rises often to the thought of God, recalling the great benefits of the redemptive Incarnation and the Holy Eucharist. Often, on the contrary, we enter a church to ask for some urgent grace, and we forget to thank God for the measureless blessing of the Eucharist. Its institution demands a special thanksgiving; this sacrament reminds us of the promises of eternal life.

The Active Purification of the Intellect

“If thy eye be single, thy whole body shall be lightsome.” Matt. 6: 22

The superior faculties of man, which he has in common with the angels, are the intellect and will. They, too, need to be purified and disciplined, for they suffer from a disorder which is the consequence of original sin and of our personal sins.

The first gaze of the intellect of the baptized infant is simple; the same is true of a soul that begins to respond generously to a higher vocation. But it may happen that in time this gaze loses its simplicity through the complexity of the things it examines with a heart that is more or less pure. Then a serious purification is needed in order to recover the first simplicity of the intellect by a profound view which dominates the details and inevitable griefs, in order to embrace life as a whole. Happy the old people who after long experience and many trials reach this superior simplicity of true wisdom, which they had glimpsed from a distance in their childhood! With this meaning it can be said that a beautiful life is a thought of youth realized in maturity.

We shall discuss here: (1) the necessity of the active purification of the intellect because of the defects found in it; (2) the active principle of this purification and what must be put into practice on this point.

THE NECESSITY OF THIS PURIFICATION: THE DEFECTS OF OUR INTELLECT

Since the commission of original sin, man’s intellect is wounded. This wound is called that of ignorance;⁹²² because of it, the intellect, instead of inclining spontaneously toward the true, and especially toward supreme Truth, has difficulty in attaining it and tends to become absorbed in the consideration of earthly things without rising to their cause. It is inclined with curiosity toward ephemeral things and, on the other hand, it is negligent and slothful in the search for our true last end and the means leading to it. Consequently the intellect easily falls into error, lets itself be darkened by the prejudices which come from inordinate passions. It may finally reach the state that is called spiritual blindness.

Doubtless, original sin did not render our intellect incapable of knowing the truth, as the first Protestants and the Jansenists held. By patient effort, it can even acquire, without the help of revelation, the knowledge of a certain number of fundamental truths of the natural order, such as the existence of God, Author of the natural moral law. But, as the Council of the Vatican declares,⁹²³ in the terms St. Thomas used,⁹²⁴ few men are capable of this labor, and they reach this result only after a considerable length of time, without succeeding in freeing themselves from all error.

It is also true that this wound of ignorance, the consequence of original sin, is in the process of healing from the time of baptism, which regenerates us by giving us sanctifying grace. This wound may, however, reopen by reason of our personal sins, especially by reason of curiosity and intellectual pride, of which we must speak here.

Curiosity is a defect of our mind, says St. Thomas,⁹²⁵ which inclines us with eagerness and precipitation toward the consideration and study of less useful subjects, making us neglect the things of God and of our salvation. This curiosity, says the holy doctor,⁹²⁶ is born of spiritual sloth in respect to divine things, and makes us lose precious time. Whereas people who have little learning but are nourished with the Gospel possess great rectitude of judgment, there are others who, far from nourishing themselves profoundly with the great Christian truths, spend a great part of their time carefully storing up useless, or at least only slightly useful, knowledge which does not at all form the judgment. They are afflicted with almost a mania for collecting. Theirs is an accumulation of knowledge mechanically arranged and unorganized, somewhat as if it were in a dictionary. This type of work, instead of training the mind, smothers it, as too much wood smothers a fire. Under this jumble of accumulated knowledge, they can no longer see the light of the first principles, which alone could bring order out of all this material and lift up their souls even to God, the Beginning and End of all things.⁹²⁷

This heavy and stupid intellectual curiosity, as St. John of the Cross says, is in this sense the inverse of contemplation, which judges all things by the supreme cause. Such curiosity could lead to spiritual folly of which St. Paul often speaks,⁹²⁸ to the folly which judges all, even the highest things, by what is lowest and at times most contemptible, by the satisfactions of our concupiscence or of our pride.

Spiritual pride is a more serious disorder than curiosity. It gives us such confidence in our reason and judgment that we are not very willing to consult others, especially our superiors, or to enlighten ourselves by the attentive and benevolent examination of reasons or facts which may be urged against us. This state of mind leads to manifest imprudent acts that will have to be painfully expiated. It leads also to asperity in discussions, to stubbornness in judgment, to disparagement which

excludes in a cutting tone all that does not fit in with our manner of seeing things. This pride may lead a person to refuse to others the liberty he claims for his own opinions, and also to submit only very imperfectly to the directions of the supreme Shepherd, and even to attenuate and minimize dogmas under the pretext of explaining them better than has been done hitherto.⁹²⁹

These defects, especially pride, may finally lead us to spiritual blindness, which is the direct opposite of the contemplation of divine things. It is necessary to insist on this point, as St. Thomas did,⁹³⁰ after he treated of the gift of understanding.

Holy Scripture often speaks of this spiritual blindness. Christ was saddened and angered by the spiritual blindness of the Pharisees,⁹³¹ and finally said to them: "Woe to you blind guides.... You tithe the mint and anise and cummin, and have left the weightier things of the law: judgment and mercy and faith.... Blind guides, who strain out a gnat, and swallow a camel."⁹³²

In St. John's Gospel⁹³³ we read that this blindness is a punishment of God, who withdraws light from such as do not wish to receive it.⁹³⁴

There are sinners who, by reason of repeated sins, no longer recognize the signified will of God manifested in a striking manner; they no longer understand that the evils which befall them are punishments of God, and they do not turn to Him. By natural laws alone, they explain these misfortunes as things that afflict a number of people at the moment. They see in them only the result of certain economic factors, such as the development of machinery and overproduction which results from it. They no longer take into account that these disorders have above all a moral cause and come from the fact that many men place their last end where it is not; not in God who would unite us, but in material goods which divide us, because they cannot belong simultaneously and integrally to a number.

Spiritual blindness leads the sinner to prefer in everything goods that are temporal rather than eternal goods. It prevents him from hearing the voice of God, which the Church recalls in the liturgy for Advent and for Lent: "Be converted to Me with all your heart.... Turn to the Lord your God, for He is gracious and merciful, patient and rich in mercy, and ready to repent of the evil"⁹³⁵

Spiritual blindness is a punishment of God which takes away the divine light because of repeated sins. But there is also a sin by which we voluntarily turn away from the consideration of divine truth by preferring to it the knowledge of that which satisfies our concupiscence of our pride.⁹³⁶

We may say of this sin what St. Thomas says of spiritual folly (stultitia), that it is opposed to the precepts of the contemplation of truth.⁹³⁷ It hinders us from seeing the proximity of death and the judgment.⁹³⁸ It takes all penetration away from us and leaves us in a state of spiritual dullness, which is like the loss of all higher intelligence.⁹³⁹ Then we no longer see the grandeur of the supreme precept of the love of God and of our neighbor, or the value of our Savior's blood shed for us, or the infinite value of the Mass, which substantially perpetuates on the altar the sacrifice of the cross.

Such a condition is a chastisement, and no heed is paid to it. As St. Augustine says: "If, when a thief stole money, he lost an eye, everybody would say that it was a punishment of God; you have lost the eye of your mind and you think that God has not punished you."⁹⁴⁰

It is surprising at times to find among Christians men who have great literary, artistic, or scientific culture, but who have merely a rudimentary and superficial knowledge of the truths of religion, a knowledge mingled with many prejudices and errors. It is a surprising disproportion, which makes them, as it were, spiritual dwarfs.

Some others, better instructed in matters of faith, the history of the Church, and its laws, have a tendency that is, so to speak, anticontemplative, permitting them to see the life of the Church only from without, as if they were looking at the exterior of the windows of a cathedral, instead of seeing them from within under the soft light which should illumine them.

This dullness of mind especially hinders the hearing of the great preaching of God, who speaks in His own way through great contemporary events. At the present time, there are in the world two radically contradictory universal tendencies, over and above the nationalism of different groups more or less opposed to one another. On the one hand, we find the universalism of the reign of Christ who wishes to draw the souls of men of all nations to God, supreme Truth and Life; on the other hand, we see false universalism, which is called communism, which draws souls in an inverse sense toward materialism, sensualism, and pride, in such a manner that the parable of the prodigal son is verified not only for individuals, but for whole nations, such as Russia.

The great problem of today is found in the conflict between the universalism of the reign of Christ and of the Church, which liberates souls, and communism, which leads them to materialist abjection and to the oppression of the weak under the pride of demagogues and leaders.⁹⁴¹

In this conflict we must turn to prayer and penance, no less than to study and apostolic work. This is what the Blessed Virgin declared at Lourdes: "Pray and do penance."

Such are the defects of the mind which exist in us in various degrees: curiosity, rash haste to learn what is useless, indifference, negligence in regard to the one thing necessary (i.e., God and our salvation); spiritual pride, blindness, and spiritual folly, which ends by judging everything by what is lowest and most petty, whereas wisdom judges everything by the

supreme cause and the last end.

How to remedy this disorder, from which we all suffer in a greater or lesser degree?

THE PRINCIPLE OF THE ACTIVE PURIFICATION OF THE INTELLECT

This purification must be made by the progress of the virtue of faith, as the purification of the memory, immersed in time, is made by the growth of the hope of eternal beatitude.

St. Thomas tells us: “To detach itself from transient things and to tend toward God, the rational creature must first of all have faith in God: faith is the first principle of the purification of the heart in order to free us from error, and faith quickened by charity perfects this purification.”⁹⁴² The intellect, which directs the will, must itself be thus purified;⁹⁴³ otherwise the root of the will would be corrupted or deflected, mingled with error.

This purification is accomplished by judging more and more according to the spirit of faith. As Cajetan⁹⁴⁴ remarks, faith leads us first of all to adhere to revealed truths because of the authority of God who reveals them; then it leads us to consider and to judge all things according to these truths. This is true even of him who, in the state of mortal sin, has kept faith by which he is preserved from graver sins, such as theft and murder; and by reason of faith he judges that he must go to Mass and not refuse to listen to the word of God. These various judgments may be made without the gifts of the Holy Ghost, which are not in a man in mortal sin; but without the gifts these judgments do not have all the perfection they should. In the just man they receive this perfection from the gifts; then they are produced in a different manner, under the inspiration of the Holy Ghost. Thus the gift of wisdom leads us to judge according to a certain connaturality or sympathy with divine things. This is the opinion of Cajetan, and many theologians adopt almost the same terms.

Not only must we adhere firmly to the truths of faith, but according to them we must judge what we are to think, say, do, or avoid in life. Then we judge according to the spirit of faith, and not according to the spirit of nature or practical naturalism.

St. John of the Cross tells us that obscure faith enlightens us.⁹⁴⁵ It is obscure because it makes us adhere to mysteries we do not see; but these mysteries, which are those of the inner life of God, greatly illumine our intellect, since they do not cease to express to us the goodness of God, who created us, raised us to the life of grace, sent His only Son to redeem us, His Son who gives Himself to us in the Eucharist in order to lead us to eternal life.

Faith is obscure, but it illumines our intellect in our journey toward eternity. It is very superior to the senses and to reason; it is the proximate means of union with God, whom it makes us know infallibly and supernaturally in obscurity.⁹⁴⁶

Faith is very superior to all the sensible and intellectual evidences that can be had on earth. What is evident for our senses, is sensible, not spiritual; therefore it is not God Himself. What is evident for our reason, is what is proportioned to it; at times this is a truth about God, His existence, for example, but it is not the inner life of God, which surpasses our reason and even the natural powers of the angelic intellect.

To see the intimate life of God, a person would have to die and receive the beatific vision. Now, faith makes us attain here on earth this inner life of God in the penumbra, in obscurity. Consequently a man who would prefer visions to infused faith would deceive himself, even if these visions were of divine origin, for he would prefer what is superficial and exterior, what is accessible to our faculties, to what surpasses them. He would prefer the figures to the divine reality. He would lose the meaning of the mystery; he would forsake true contemplation by withdrawing from this divine obscurity.⁹⁴⁷

Obscure faith enlightens us somewhat like the night, which, though surrounding us with shadows, allows us to see the stars, and by them the depths of the firmament. There is here a mingling of light and shade which is extremely beautiful. That we may see the stars, the sun must hide, night must begin. Amazingly, in the obscurity of night we see to a far greater distance than in the day; we see even the distant stars, which reveal to us the immense expanse of the heavens.

In the same way, the senses and reason allow us to see only what belongs to the natural order, only what is within their reach, whereas faith, although obscure, opens up to us the supernatural world and its infinite depths, the kingdom of God, His inner life, which we shall see unveiled and clearly in eternity.

St. John of the Cross reiterates this teaching, which is like a commentary on the definition of faith given by St. Paul,⁹⁴⁸ a definition which St. Thomas sums up by saying: “Faith is a habit of the mind whereby eternal life is begun in us, making the intellect assent to what is non-apparent,” since it makes us adhere to the mystery of the inner life of God which we shall see in eternity.⁹⁴⁹

It follows that, to live by faith, we should consider everything under its light: God, first of all, then ourselves, others, friends or strangers, and all agreeable or painful events. We should see them not only from the sensible, but also from the rational point of view, from the supernatural point of view of faith, which would be equivalent to considering all things, so to speak, with the eye of God, or somewhat as God sees them.⁹⁵⁰ Whence the manifest necessity of purifying our mind of curiosity, by no longer preferring the study of the secondary, of the subordinate, and sometimes of what is useless to the attentive meditation of the one thing necessary, to the reading of the Gospel and of all that can truly nourish the soul.⁹⁵¹ This necessity of the

supernatural point of view shows the importance of spiritual reading together with study and distinct from it.

Consequently it is of prime importance not to devour books in order to appear well informed and to be able to talk about them, but to read what is suitable to the life of the soul, in a spirit of humility in order to be penetrated with it, to put it into practice, and to do real good to others.⁹⁵² We may recall with profit what St. Paul says (Rom. 12: 3): “For I say, by the grace that is given me, to all that are among you, not to be more wise than it behooveth to be wise, but to be wise unto sobriety.”⁹⁵³

Therefore we must avoid rash haste in judgment, for this haste is the source of many errors.⁹⁵⁴ We must even more avoid tenacity⁹⁵⁵ in our own judgment, and correct this defect by docility to the directions of the Church, to those of our spiritual director, and also to the Holy Spirit, who wishes to be our interior Master that He may make us live increasingly the life of faith and give us in it a foretaste of the life of heaven.

If we followed this rule, the consideration of details would no longer make us lose sight of the whole, as so often happens, just as trees seen too near hinder one from seeing the forest. Those who say that the problem of evil cannot be solved and find in it an occasion of sin, are absorbed in the woeful verification of certain painful details and lose the general view of the providential plan in which everything is ordained to the good of those who love the Lord.

The excessively meticulous study of details makes us depreciate the first global view of things; when the latter is pure, however, it is already elevated and salutary. Thus when a Christian child sees the starry sky, he finds in it a splendid sign of the infinite grandeur of God. Later on, if he becomes absorbed in the scientific study of the different constellations, he may forget the view of the whole, to which the intellect must finally return the better to comprehend its loftiness and profundity. It has been said that if a little learning withdraws a person from religion, great learning brings him back to it.⁹⁵⁶

Likewise the great supernatural facts which are produced by God to enlighten the simple and to save them, such as the fact of Lourdes, are rather easily grasped by the clean of heart. They quickly see the supernatural origin, meaning, and import of these facts. If this simple, and at the same time superior, point of view is forgotten because of absorption in the study of details considered from the material point of view, only an undecipherable enigma may be found in it, and at times only something impossible to see through. Then, while learned men discourse endlessly without being able to reach a conclusion, God does His work in the clean of heart. Finally, more profound learning, accompanied by humility, leads back to the original view of the whole in order to confirm it, and to recognize the action of God and the profound good done to souls. Thus, after a life consecrated to the study of philosophy and theology, the soul delights in returning to the simplicity of faith of the patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to the words of the psalms, to the parables of the Gospel. It is the purification of the intellect which prepares for contemplation.

The Active Purification of the Will

“For Thou art God my strength.” Ps.42:2

We have seen that the intellect must be purified not only from error, ignorance, willfulness, and spiritual blindness, but also from curiosity, which gives too much importance to what is secondary and not enough to what is primary, when the work of the intellect should be directed to God, our last end, and to the good of souls. We must now speak of the purification and training of the will.

The will or rational appetite, which is very superior to the sensitive appetite, is a faculty which tends toward the good known through the intellect; it has for its object the universal good, which permits it to rise to the love of God, the sovereign Good. Whereas each of the other faculties is inclined to its own good the sight to what is visible, the intellect to the intelligible true-the will is inclined to the good of the entire man This explains why it applies the other faculties to the exercise of their acts, for example, the intellect to the search for the true. This is also why, if the will is fundamentally upright, a man is good; he is not only a good mathematician or a good physician, he is a man of good or, as the Gospel says, “a man of good will” On the contrary, if the will has not the desired rectitude, if it is not inclined toward the true good of the entire man, he may be a good logician, a good painter, or a good musician, but he is not a man of good; he is an egoist, whose virtues, more apparent than real, are inspired by pride, ambition, or the fear of difficulties and vexations.⁹⁵⁷

Thus free will gives not only to its own (or elicited) acts, but also to the acts of the other faculties which it commands (commanded acts), their liberty and their merit or demerit. Therefore, to regulate the will is to regulate the entire man. But in the will there are defects, deviations, which are the result of original sin and of our personal sins.

THE PRINCIPAL DEFECT OF THE WILL: SELF-LOVE

The strength of the will to move itself and to incline the other faculties to act comes from its docility to God, from its conformity to the divine will, because then, by grace, the divine strength passes into it. This is the great principle dominating this whole question.

All the meaning and the bearing of this principle are seen when we recall that, in the state of original justice, as long as the will was subject to God through love and obedience, it had the strength to command the passions completely and to reject every disorder of the sensible faculties; the passions were then totally subjected to the will vivified by charity.⁹⁵⁸

Since original sin, we are born without sanctifying grace and charity, with our wills turned away from God, the supernatural last end, and weak for the accomplishment of our duties even in the natural order.⁹⁵⁹

Without falling into the exaggeration of the first Protestants and the Jansenists, we must say that we are born with a will inclined to egoism, to inordinate self-love. This is called the wound of malice;⁹⁶⁰ it often manifests itself by a gross egoism, against which one should guard, an egoism that mingles in all man’s acts. It follows that the will, which has become weak by reason of its lack of docility to God, no longer has absolute power over the sensible faculties, but only a sort of moral power or persuasion to lead them to subject themselves.⁹⁶¹ Doubtless after baptism, which regenerated us by giving us sanctifying grace and charity, this wound, like the others, is in the process of healing; but it also reopens by reason of our personal sins.

The principal defect of the will is the lack of rectitude, called self-love or inordinate love of self, which forgets the love due to God and that which we should have for our neighbor. Self-love or egoism is manifestly the source of all sins.⁹⁶² From it are born “the concupiscence of the flesh, the concupiscence of the eyes, and the pride of life.”⁹⁶³ The sensible appetites, which are no longer firmly led, incline man to thoughtlessness, feverish eagerness, fruitless agitation, selfish search for all that pleases, flight from all that is painful, nonchalance, discouragement, in which he sees that his will has lost its strength, and to all sorts of bad examples.⁹⁶⁴

It is clear that self-will, which is defined as that which is not conformed to the will of God, is the source of every sin. Self-will is extremely dangerous because it can corrupt everything; even what is best in one may become evil when self-will enters in, for it takes itself as its end, instead of subordinating itself to God. If the Lord perceives this will in a fast or a sacrifice, He rejects them because He sees therein a divine work accomplished through pride in order to gain approbation. Now, self-will is born of self-love or egoism; it is strong self-love that has become imperious.

On the subject of self-love or egoism, we may fall into two opposing errors: utilitarianism and quietism. Theoretical or practical utilitarianism does not see an evil in egoism, but a power that should be moderated. This doctrine, which reduces

virtue to a business transaction, suppresses all morality; it reduces praiseworthy good to the useful and the delectable. This good, the object of virtue and duty, ought to be loved for itself and more than ourselves, independently of the advantages or the pleasure that may result therefrom: “Do what you ought, come what may.” Practical utilitarianism leads to pride, which inclines a person to make himself the center of all who live about him; it is the manifest or hidden pride of the desire to dominate.

On the other hand, quietism⁹⁶⁵ condemned all interested love, even that of our eternal reward, as if there were a disorder in Christian hope, from the fact that it is less perfect than charity.⁹⁶⁶ Under the pretext of absolute disinterestedness, many quietists fell into spiritual sloth, which is indifferent to sanctification and salvation.⁹⁶⁷

The thought of salvation and eternal beatitude is evidently very useful that we may strive to put to death inordinate love of self, which is the principal defect of our will. It is of this love that St. Augustine wrote: “Two loves have built two cities: the love of self even to the despising of God, the city of the earth; the love of God even to the despising of self, the city of God. One glorifies itself in self, and the other in the Lord. One seeks its glory from men, the other places its dearest glory in God, the witness of its conscience. The one in the pride of its glory walks with head high; the other says to its God: ‘Thou art my glory, and it is Thou who dost lift up my head.’ The former in its victories lets itself be conquered by its passion to dominate; the latter shows us its citizens united in charity, mutual servants, tutelary governors, obedient subjects. The former loves its own strength in its princes; the latter says to God: ‘Lord, Thou art my only strength, I shall love Thee.’”⁹⁶⁸ One would never weary of quoting St. Augustine.

A great purification and Christian training of the will are necessary to obliterate all inordinate self-love; this result is produced in us by the progress of charity, which “unites man to God so that he lives not for himself, but for God.”⁹⁶⁹

Egoism is like a cancer of the will, which ravages it more and more, whereas sanctifying grace should be in it like a strong root which buries itself ever deeper in the soil in order to draw therefrom nourishing secretions and transform them into fruitful sap. We should think of the value of habitual grace, called the “grace of the virtues and the gifts,” because of various proximate principles of meritorious acts springing from it. We would do well to consider that our will should possess a high degree of the virtues of justice, penance, religion, hope, and charity in order that its powers may be vastly increased.

The author of *The Imitation* thus describes inordinate self-love when he has Christ say: “My son, thou must give all for all, and be nothing of thy own. Know that the love of thyself is more hurtful to thee than anything of the world.... If thy love be pure, simple, and well ordered, thou shalt not be in captivity to anything. Covet not that which thou mayest not have. Seek not to have that which may embarrass thee and deprive thee of thy inward liberty. It is wonderful that thou wilt not, from the very bottom of thy heart, commit thyself wholly to Me, with all things that thou canst desire or have. Why dost thou pine away with vain grief? Why art thou so worn with superfluous cares? Be resigned to My good pleasure, and thou shalt suffer no loss. If thou seekest this or that, or wouldst be here or there for thy own interests’ sake, and the more to indulge thy own will, thou wilt never be at rest or free from solicitude; for in everything there will be found some defect, and in every place therewill be someone that will cross thee.”⁹⁷⁰

The same book of *The Imitation* describes well the various movements of wounded nature, which remains weakened even after baptism:

Nature is crafty and draweth away many, ensnareth them and deceiveth them, and always proposeth self as her end..⁹⁷¹ Nature is neither willing to be mortified, restrained, overcome, nor subject, neither of its own accord to be brought under obedience.... Nature laboreth for its own interest and considereth what gain it may derive from another.... It willingly receiveth honor and respect,... is afraid of shame and contempt; seeketh to have things that are curious and beautiful;... hath regard to temporal things, rejoiceth at earthly gains, is troubled at losses, and is irritated at every slight injurious word.... Nature is covetous, and liketh rather to take than to give, and loveth to have things exclusive and private.... Nature glorieth in noble place and descent, smileth on them that are in power, flattereth the rich.... It easily complaineth of want and of trouble; it coveteth to know secrets and to hear news; desireth to appear abroad, longeth to be taken notice of, and to do those things which may procure praise and admiration....

Grace teacheth, therefore, to restrain the senses, to avoid vain complacency and ostentation, humbly to hide those things which are worthy of praise and admiration; and from everything, and in every knowledge, to seek the fruit of utility, and the praise and honor of God.... This grace is a supernatural light and a certain special gift of God, the proper mark of the elect, and a pledge of eternal salvation, which elevateth a man from earthly things to love such as are heavenly, and from carnal maketh him spiritual. Wherefore, as nature is the more kept down and subdued, with so much the greater abundance is grace infused; and every day by new visitations the interior man is reformed according to the image of God.⁹⁷²

St. Catherine of Siena, speaking of the effects of self-love, says: “The soul cannot live without love, but always desires to love something.... So, if the sensual affection desires to love sensual things, the eye of the intellect sets before itself for its sole object transitory things, with self-love, displeasure of virtue, and love of vice, whence it draws pride and impatience, and the memory is filled with nothing but what the affection presents to it. This love so dazzles the eye of the intellect that it can discern and see nothing but such glittering objects.”⁹⁷³

We read in the same *Dialogue*: “Thus is injustice committed through miserable self-love, which has poisoned the whole world, and the mystical body of holy Church, and through which the garden of My spouse has run to seed and given birth to

putrid flowers.”⁹⁷⁴ It is self-love that renders man unjust toward God, to whom he no longer renders the glory that is due Him, and toward souls to which he no longer gives the true goods without which they cannot live. Finally, self-love, which overthrows in our will the order willed by God, leads to trouble, discouragement, discord, and all dissensions; it brings about the total loss of peace, the tranquillity of order, which is truly found only in those who love God more than themselves and above all.

All the passages in Tauler’s works where he speaks of the necessity of purifying the depths of our will should be consulted.⁹⁷⁵

THE PURIFICATION OF THE WILL BY PROGRESS IN THE LOVE OF GOD

How can we restore to our more or less weakened and vitiated will its power for good, the real power that makes it conquer spiritual sloth and also pride, which is a weakness hidden under the mask of energy? To bring about this restoration, we must remember the harmony existing in the state of original justice in which, as long as man’s will was docile and conformable to that of God, it had the grace and strength to dominate the passions, to prevent every fault, whence spring disorder and discouragement. To renew our spiritual energies we must, therefore, render our will increasingly docile to the will of God, who will then give us ever new graces to advance along the way of perfection.

The training of the will must be made by progress in the virtues which it ought to possess: the virtue of justice, which renders to everyone his due; of religion, which renders to God the worship we owe Him; of penance, which repairs the injury of sin; of obedience to superiors; of veracity or of loyalty; above all, of charity, of love of God and neighbor.⁹⁷⁶

From this higher point of view, the strength of will of a Napoleon seems insignificant compared to that of the sublime beggar, St. Benedict Joseph Labre, or that of the humble Cure of Ars. In the first centuries, the strength of will of Christian virgins, like Agnes and Cecilia, was incomparably superior to that of their executioners.

In the practice of all the virtues, docility to the divine will presupposes abnegation of self-will, that is, of the will not conformed to that of God. The spirit of sacrifice alone, by putting to death our inordinate self-love, can assure the first place to the love of God and give us peace. Profound peace of soul is impossible without the spirit of sacrifice. Therefore our Lord says: “If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself”;⁹⁷⁷ and also, “Unless the grain of wheat falling into the ground die, itself remaineth alone. But if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit. He that loveth his life (selfishly) shall lose it; and he that hateth his life in this world (who leads a sacrificed life) keepeth it unto life eternal”⁹⁷⁸ In the spirit of abnegation we must be ready to abandon everything in order to do the will of God as it shall be manifested to us. We must say with the Psalmist: “My heart is ready, O God, my heart is ready.”⁹⁷⁹ Like St. Paul at the moment of his conversion, we must daily pray thus: “Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?”⁹⁸⁰

Is this purification of the will in order to remove egoism and self will, something difficult? By reason of reiterated faults, it is very difficult in certain persons, and without divine grace it is even impossible in everyone. In fact, only the love of God, which is the fruit of grace, can triumph over self-love and put it to death; but if the love of God grows in us, what was at first difficult becomes easy. With this meaning Christ said: “My yoke is sweet and My burden light.”⁹⁸¹

Mortification of self-will is facilitated in the religious life by the practice of obedience, which rectifies and considerably strengthens the will by making it daily more and more conformable to the divine will, manifested by the rule and the orders of superiors.

To succeed in purifying and strengthening the will, a person must act according to the profound convictions of Christian faith, and not according to his own spirit, which is more or less variable, according to circumstances and the fluctuations of opinion. When anyone has reflected before God and prayed to obtain His grace, he must act with decision in the way duty directs or in that which seems most conformable to the divine will. We have only one life, and it is short; it must not be wasted in trifles. Moreover, we must with persevering courage firmly and persistently will what appears to us to be our duty. In this way we avoid both the fluctuations of successive inclinations, some opposed to others, and unreasonable violence. True strength of will is calm; in calmness it is persevering so that it does not become discouraged by momentary lack of success or by any wounds received. No one is conquered until he has given up the struggle. And he who works for the Lord puts his confidence in God and not in himself.⁹⁸²

Lastly, the strong will is the one that rests, not on the careening of obstinate pride, but on God, on His grace, which we ought to ask for daily with humility and confidence. If with humility, confidence, and perseverance we implore the graces necessary for our sanctification and salvation, they will infallibly be granted us in virtue of Christ’s promise: “Ask, and it shall be given you: seek, and you shall find: knock, and it shall be opened to you.” 926) Genuine strength of will, the effect of divine grace, is drawn from humble, trusting, and persevering prayer.⁹⁸³ Therein is found the true supernatural training of the will. Prayer is our strength in our weakness. Knowledge of its power made St. Paul say: “I can do all things in Him who strengtheneth me.”⁹⁸⁴ This should be the sentiment of one who sees himself obliged to undergo martyrdom rather than deny his Christian faith. God

never commands the impossible and gives to those who truly ask it the grace to be faithful in the midst of the greatest trials. Then the will becomes strong, with that divine strength of which the Psalmist speaks when he says: *Dominus fortitudo mea*. By divine grace the human will then shares in the power of God and frees itself from self-love, from the attraction of everything that turns it away from God and hinders it from being wholly His. Thus abnegation and the spirit of sacrifice are the inevitable way of divine union, in which the love of God is finally victorious over self-love or egoism. He who has this holy hatred of his ego, which is made up of self-love and pride, saves his soul for eternity and obtains even here on earth a peace and union with God which are a foretaste of eternal life.

THE SPIRIT OF DETACHMENT

In *The Ascent of Mount Carmel*,⁹⁸⁵ St. John of the Cross sets forth a profound doctrine on the perfect abnegation of self-will. He indicates the most direct route to reach lofty perfection and shows how the austerity of the narrow way leads to the sweetness of divine union. If we recall the elevation of the end he has in view, we will not consider the abnegation he demands exaggerated. A man who wishes to climb a mountain does not stop at the first difficulties; knowing that he needs energy, he urges himself forward. The same is true of him who truly wishes to make progress toward the summit of perfection.

We shall sum up the teaching of St. John of the Cross on detachment in respect to exterior goods and in regard to the goods of the spirit and of the heart, in a word, to all that is not God and His will.

We should detach ourselves from exterior goods, riches and honors. “If riches abound, set not your heart upon them.”⁹⁸⁶ St. Paul says: “The time is short... and they that rejoice, as if they rejoiced not;... and they that use this world, as if they used it not.”⁹⁸⁷ Even those who do not effectively practice the counsel of evangelical poverty ought to have its spirit if they wish to tend to perfection.

We must detach ourselves from the goods of the body, from beauty, from health itself; it would be an aberration to cling to them more than to union with God. And we cling to health far more than we think; if it were irremediably taken from us, it would be a true sacrifice for us, and one that may be asked of us. All these things will pass away like a flower that withers.

We must avoid all complacency in the virtues we may have. To entertain any complacency would be vanity and perhaps amount to scorn of our neighbor. The Christian ought to esteem the virtues, not inasmuch as they are in him like a personal possession, but inasmuch as they lead the soul to God.

When we receive consolations in prayer, we must not dwell on them with satisfaction; to do so would be to make of this means of drawing near to God an obstacle that would hinder us from reaching Him. It would be the equivalent of pausing in a selfish fashion over something created and making an end of the means. By so doing, we would set out on the road of spiritual pride and illusion.⁹⁸⁸ All that glitters is not gold; and we must be careful not to confound an imitation diamond with a real one. We should remind ourselves of our Savior’s words: “Seek ye therefore first the kingdom of God and His justice; and all these things (all that is useful to your soul and even to your body) shall be added unto you.”⁹⁸⁹

Therefore we understand that adversity is good for us in order to deliver us from illusion and make us find the true road again.

Finally, if a person were to receive extraordinary graces, such as the gift of prophecy, he should avoid all attachment to this divine favor and live in holy detachment in its regard, at the same time recalling the words of St. Paul: “If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal.”⁹⁹⁰ Christ also says to His apostles: “But yet rejoice not in this, that spirits are subject unto you (that you drive out demons); but rejoice in this, that your names are written in heaven.”⁹⁹¹

On the subject of eloquence, St. John of the Cross says: “For though it is true that a good style and action, profound learning, and correct expression have a greater effect when they accompany true spirituality; still when that is wanting, though the senses be charmed and the understanding delighted, but little or no substantial warmth reaches to the will. In general, the will remains dull and weak as before in good works, though marvelous things have been marvelously told it.... Though men may be wonderful preachers, yet their sermons are soon forgotten if they kindle no fire in the will.”⁹⁹²

This teaching of St. John of the Cross demonstrates how necessary it is that the preacher greatly purify his intention that his words may truly bear life-giving fruit, which will last for eternity. To effect this purification, his soul must live according to the spirit of immolation or of sacrifice, which assures the first place in the soul to the love of God and of souls in God.

The fruit of the purification of the will, which we have just mentioned, is peace, the tranquillity of order in which the soul is established with respect to God and its neighbor. This peace is not always joy, but it tends to become more profound and more lofty and to radiate even on the most troubled souls, giving them the light of life. This is what Christ says: “Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God.” They will make Him known and loved.

As a practical conclusion, each one ought, in his examination of conscience, to ask himself whether his spirit of self-abnegation is increasing or diminishing. If there is no longer the minimum of exterior mortification, it is a sign that interior

mortification has disappeared, that he no longer tends toward perfection, and that he is like salt which has lost its savor.

Here it should be remembered that on the journey toward God, he who does not advance falls back. And what would a religious or sacerdotal life be in which there is evidence of slower and slower progress, like the movement of a stone that has been cast into the air and that will soon fall back? A uniformly retarded progress is followed by a recoil. Especially in the religious and sacerdotal life, this progress should, on the contrary, be so to speak uniformly accelerated, like the movement of a stone that tends toward the center of the earth which attracts it. Souls ought, in fact, to advance more rapidly toward God, the nearer they approach Him and are more drawn by Him.⁹⁹³

We should pray as follows: "My God, make me know the obstacles which I more or less consciously place to the working of grace in my soul. Show these obstacles to me at the moment when I am about to place them. Give me the strength to remove them, and, if I am negligent in doing so, do Thou deign to remove them, though I should suffer greatly. I wish only Thee, Lord, who alone art necessary. Grant that my life here on earth may be like eternal life begun."

He who would say this prayer frequently would make great progress, which would be written in the book of life. Undoubtedly he would receive many crosses, but he would be borne by them more than he would bear them, as a bird is borne by its wings more than it bears them. This is what *The Imitation* says: "If thou carry the cross willingly, it will carry thee, and bring thee to thy desired end, namely, to that place where there will be an end of suffering, though here there will be no end."⁹⁹⁴ This is the true road by which one enters the inner courts of the kingdom of God.

The Healing of Pride

To complete what we have said about the active purification of the intellect and will, we must speak particularly of the healing of two fatal spiritual maladies: pride and spiritual sloth.

First of all, we shall see the general nature of pride in contradistinction to the virtues of humility and of magnanimity; then the various forms of pride and the way to heal them.

THE TRUE NATURE OF PRIDE

To know the true nature of pride, we should first note that it is a spiritual sin, in itself less shameful and less debasing, but more grievous, says St. Thomas,⁹⁹⁵ than the sins of the flesh, because it turns us more away from God. The sins of the flesh could not be in the demon who was irremediably lost through pride. Scripture on several occasions says that “pride is the beginning of all sin,”⁹⁹⁶ because it does away with the humble submission and obedience of the creature to God. The first sin of the first man was a sin of pride,⁹⁹⁷ the desire of the knowledge of good and evil,⁹⁹⁸ that he might be his own guide and not have to obey. In the opinion of St. Thomas,⁹⁹⁹ pride is more than a capital sin; it is the source of the capital sins, and particularly of vainglory, which is one of its first effects.

Some are deceived, at least practically, about the true nature of pride, and as a result, without wishing to do so, may commend false humility, which is a form of hidden pride more dangerous than that which displays itself and makes itself ridiculous.

In determining exactly the true nature of pride, the difficulty comes from the fact that it is opposed not only to humility, but also to magnanimity, which is sometimes confounded with it.¹⁰⁰⁰ We should be at pains not to confound practically the magnanimity of others with pride, and not to mistake our pusillanimity or timidity for true humility. Sometimes the inspiration of the gift of counsel is needed to discern these things in a really practical manner, to see how the truly humble soul must be magnanimous, and how false humility is distinguished from the true. The Jansenists saw a lack of humility in the desire for frequent Communion.

St. Thomas, who was exceedingly humble and magnanimous, established very well the exact definition of these two virtues, which should be united, and that of the defects opposed to them. He defined pride as the inordinate love of our own excellence. The proud man wishes, in fact, to appear superior to what he really is: there is falsity in his life. When this inordinate love of our own excellence is concerned with sensible goods, for example, pride in our physical strength, it belongs to that part of the sensibility called the irascible appetite. It is in the will when it is concerned with goods of the spiritual order, such as intellectual pride and spiritual pride. This defect of the will presupposes that our intellect considers our own merits and the insufficiencies of our neighbors more than it ought, and that it exaggerates in order to raise us above them.

Love of our own excellence is said to be inordinate as it is contrary to right reason and divine law. It is directly opposed to the humble submission of the defectible and deficient creature before the majesty of God. It differs exceedingly from the legitimate desire of great things conformable to our vocation: for example, a magnanimous soldier can and ought to desire victory for his country without pride entering into his wish. Whereas the proud man immoderately desires his own excellence, the magnanimous man devotes himself to a great cause, superior to himself, and accepts in advance all humiliations in order to accomplish what is in his estimation a great duty.

Pride is therefore, as St. Augustine says,¹⁰⁰¹ a perverse love of greatness; it leads us to imitate God in a wrong way, by not bearing with the equality of our fellow men and by wishing to impose our domination on them, instead of living with them in humble submission to the divine law.¹⁰⁰²

Pride is thus more directly opposed to humility than to magnanimity; the inverse holds true for pusillanimity, which is more directly opposed to nobility of soul. In addition, whereas humility and magnanimity are connected virtues which complete and balance each other like the two arches of an ogive, pride and pusillanimity are contradictory vices, like temerity and cowardice.

What we have said shows that pride is a bandage over the eyes of the spirit, which hinders us from seeing the truth, especially that relative to the majesty of God and the excellence of those who surpass us. It prevents us from wishing to be instructed by them, or it prompts us not to accept direction without argument. Pride thus perverts our life as one would bend a spring; it hinders us from asking light from God, who consequently hides His truth from the proud. Pride turns us away,

therefore, from the affective knowledge of divine truth, from contemplation, to which humility, on the contrary, disposes us. Therefore Christ says: “I confess to Thee, a Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because Thou hast hidden these things from the wise and prudent and hast revealed them to little ones.”¹⁰⁰³ Spiritual pride is most powerful in turning us away, from the contemplation of divine things. With this meaning, St. Paul writes: “Knowledge puffeth up; but charity edifieth.”¹⁰⁰⁴

THE DIFFERENT FORMS OF PRIDE

St. Gregory¹⁰⁰⁵ enumerates several degrees of pride: namely, to believe that we have through our own efforts what we have received from God; to believe that we have merited what we have gratuitously received; to attribute to ourselves a good we lack, for example, great learning, when we do not possess it; to wish to be preferred to others and to depreciate them.

Doubtless it is rare that a man lets himself be led so far astray by pride as to reject the existence of God, to declare that he will have “neither God nor master,” even to refuse explicitly to submit himself to God as Lucifer did, or to go so far as to reject the authority of the Church as formal heretics do. We clearly recognize in theory that God is our first principle, that He alone is great, and that obedience is due Him; but in practice it happens that we esteem ourselves inordinately, as if we were the author of the qualities we possess. We may take complacency in them, forgetting our dependence on Him who is the Author of all good, whether natural or supernatural. It is not rare to find a sort of Pelagianism in men who are in no way Pelagians in theory.

A man exaggerates his personal qualities by closing his eyes to his own defects; and he even ends by glorying in what is a deviation of the spirit, as if it were a quality. He may believe, for example, that he is broadminded because he pays scant attention to the little duties of daily life; he forgets that to be faithful in great things, he must begin by being so in little things, for the day is composed of hours, the hour of minutes, and the minute of seconds. Thus he is led to prefer himself unjustly to others, to disparage them, to believe himself better than some who are, nevertheless, really his superiors.

These sins of pride, which are often venial, may become mortal if they incite us to gravely reprehensible acts.

St. Bernard¹⁰⁰⁶ enumerates also several progressive manifestations of pride: curiosity, levity of mind, foolish and misplaced joy, boasting, singularity, arrogance, presumption, the refusal to recognize one’s errors, the dissimulation of one’s sins in confession, rebellion, unbridled liberty, the habit of sin even to the contempt of God.

The different forms of pride may also be considered in relation to the different goods, according as a person takes pride in his birth, wealth, physical qualities, knowledge, his piety or his sham piety.

Intellectual pride leads certain studious men to reject the traditional interpretation of dogmas, to attenuate them, or to deform them in order to harmonize them with what they call the exigencies of the mind. In others, this pride is manifested by a singular attachment to their own judgment, to such a degree that they do not even wish to listen to reasons sometimes stronger in favor of the adverse opinion. Some finally, who are theoretically in the truth, are so satisfied to be right, so filled with their learning which has cost them so much, that their souls are, as it were, saturated with it and no longer humbly open to receive the superior light that would come from God in prayer.

St. Paul wrote to the Corinthians: “You are now full; you are now become rich.”¹⁰⁰⁷ On seeing their sufficiency, one would have said that they had reached the full Messianic royalty to which the faithful will be associated in eternal beatitude.

If a man is full of himself, how will he receive the superior gifts which the Lord could and would grant him in order that he might do great good to souls and save them? We can see, consequently, why intellectual pride, even in those who are theoretically right, is a formidable obstacle to the grace of contemplation and to union with God. It is truly a bandage over the eyes of the spirit.¹⁰⁰⁸

Spiritual pride is not a lesser obstacle. Speaking of beginners, St. John of the Cross remarks:

When beginners become aware of their own fervor and diligence in their spiritual works and devotional exercises, this prosperity of theirs gives rise to secret pride—though holy things tend of their own nature to humility—because of their imperfections; and the issue is that they conceive a certain satisfaction in the contemplation of their works and of themselves. From the same source, too, proceeds that empty eagerness which they display in speaking of the spiritual life before others, and sometimes as teachers rather than learners. They condemn others in their heart when they see that they are not devout in their way. Sometimes also they say it in words, showing themselves herein to be like the Pharisee, who in the act of prayer boasted of his own works and despised the publican (Luke 18: I I f.).... They see the mote in the eye of their brother, but not the beam which is in their own.

Sometimes also when their spiritual masters, such as confessors and superiors, do not approve of their spirit and conduct... they decide that they are not understood, and that their superiors are not spiritual men because they do not approve and sanction their proceedings.... They are occasionally desirous that others should perceive their spirituality and devotion, and for that end they give outward tokens by movements, sighs, and various ceremonies.... Many of them seek to be the favorites of their confessors, and the result is endless envy and disquietude. Ashamed to confess their sins plainly lest their confessors should think less of them, they go about palliating them that they may not seem so bad: which is excusing rather than accusing themselves. Sometimes they go to a stranger to confess their sins, that their usual confessor may think they are not sinners, but good people.... Some beginners, too, make light of their faults, and at other times indulge in immoderate grief when they commit them. They thought themselves already saints, and so they become angry and impatient with themselves, which is another great imperfection.¹⁰⁰⁹

THE DEFECTS BORN OF PRIDE

The principal defects springing from pride are presumption, ambition, and vainglory.

Presumption is the desire and inordinate hope of doing what is above one's power.¹⁰¹⁰ The presumptuous man believes himself capable of studying and solving the most difficult questions; he settles the most abstruse problems with rash haste. He fancies that he has sufficient light to guide himself without consulting a director. Instead of building his interior life on humility, renunciation, fidelity to the duty of the present moment even in little things, he speaks particularly of magnanimity, of apostolic zeal, or indeed aspires to the immediate attainment of the high degrees of prayer without passing through the various stages, forgetting that he is still only a beginner, whose will is still weak and full of egoism. He is still full of self; a great void must be created in him in order that his soul may some day be filled with God and able to give Him to others.

From presumption springs ambition, under one form or another. Because a man presumes too greatly on his powers and judges himself superior to others, he wishes to dominate them, to impose on them his ideas in matters of doctrine, or to govern them. St. Thomas¹⁰¹¹ says that a man manifests ambition when he seeks offices carrying with them honor which he does not merit; when he seeks honors for himself and not for the glory of God or the profit of others. How many schemes, secret solicitations, and intrigues ambition inspires in all walks of life!¹⁰¹²

Pride leads also to vainglory, that is, the wish to be esteemed for oneself, without referring this honor to God, the source of all good, and often a wish to be esteemed for vain things. This is the case of the pedant who loves to display his knowledge, binding himself and wishing to bind others to trifles.¹⁰¹³

Many defects spring from vainglory:¹⁰¹⁴ boasting, which easily makes a person ridiculous; hypocrisy, which under the appearances of virtue, hides vices; stubbornness, contention or asperity in defending one's opinion, which engenders discord; and also disobedience, sharp criticisms of superiors.

Thus we see that pride which is not repressed sometimes produces disastrous effects. How many discords, hatreds, and wars are born of pride! It has been justly said that pride is the great enemy of perfection because it is the source of numerous sins and deprives us of many graces and merits. Scripture says: "God resisteth the proud and giveth grace to the humble."¹⁰¹⁵ And Christ says of the Pharisees, who pray and give alms in order to be seen by men: "They have received their reward";¹⁰¹⁶ they cannot expect that of our heavenly Father, since they have acted for themselves and not for Him. Lastly, a life dominated by pride is grievously sterile and presages perdition unless a remedy is promptly applied.

THE REMEDY FOR PRIDE

The great remedy for pride is to recognize practically the majesty of God. As St. Michael the archangel said: "Who is like to God?" He alone is great; He is the source of all natural and supernatural good. "Without Me," says our Lord, "you can do nothing" in the order of salvation.¹⁰¹⁷ St. Paul adds: "For who distinguisheth thee? Or what hast thou that thou hast not received? And if thou hast received, why dost thou glory, as if thou hadst not received it?"¹⁰¹⁸ "Not that we are sufficient to think anything of ourselves, as of ourselves, but our sufficiency is from God."¹⁰¹⁹

St. Thomas states also: "Since God's love is the cause of goodness in things,... no one thing would be better than another if God did not will greater good for one than another."¹⁰²⁰ And then why should we glory in the natural or supernatural good that is in us, as if we had not received it, as if it were our very own and not ordained to glorify God, the source of all good? "For it is God who worketh in you, both to will and to accomplish, according to His good will."¹⁰²¹

The remedy for pride is to tell ourselves that of ourselves we are not, that we have been created out of nothing by the gratuitous love of God, who continues freely to preserve us in existence; otherwise we would return to nothingness. And if grace is in us, it is because Jesus Christ redeemed us by His blood.

The remedy for pride is also to tell ourselves that there is in us something inferior to nothingness itself: the disorder of sin and its effects. As sinners, we deserve scorn and all humiliations; the saints have thought so, and they certainly judged better than we.

How can we glory in our merits, as if they came solely from us? Without habitual grace and actual grace, we would be absolutely incapable of the least meritorious act. As St. Augustine says: "God crowns His gifts, when He crowns our merits."

This conviction, however, must not remain theoretical, but should be practical and inspire our acts. *The Imitation* says:

Truly, a lowly rustic that serveth God is better than a proud philosopher who pondereth the courses of the stars, and neglecteth himself. He that knoweth himself, becometh vile to himself and taketh no delight in the praises of men.... Learned men are very willing to seem wise, and to be called so.... If thou wouldst acquire knowledge and learn anything to the purpose, love to be unknown, and to be esteemed as nothing.... If thou shouldst see another openly do wrong or commit some grievous sins, thou needest not think thyself better; for thou knowest not how long thou mayest be able to persevere in well-doing. We are all frail; but see thou think none more frail than thyself....

Be not ashamed to wait on others for the love of Jesus Christ, and to be looked upon as poor in this world.... Trust not in thine own knowledge,... but rather in the grace of God, who helpeth the humble and humbleth them that presume upon themselves.... Esteem not thyself better than others, lest perhaps thou be accounted worse in the sight of God.... What pleaseth men, oftentimes displeaseth Him.... Continual peace dwelleth with the humble; but in the heart of the proud is frequent envy and indignation....

The humble man God protecteth and delivereth; the humble He loveth and consoleth; to the humble He inclineth Himself; on the humble He bestoweth bounteous grace, and after he has been brought low, raiseth him up unto glory. To the humble He revealeth His secrets, and sweetly inviteth and draweth him unto Himself.^{[1022](#)}

But to reach this humility of mind and heart, a profound purification is needed. That which we impose on ourselves is not sufficient; there must be a passive purification by the light of the gifts of the Holy Ghost, which causes the bandage of pride to fall away, opens our eyes, shows us the depth of frailty and wretchedness that exists in us, the utility of adversity and humiliation, and finally makes us say to the Lord: “It is good for me that Thou hast humbled me, that I may learn Thy justifications.”^{[1023](#)} “It is good for us sometimes to suffer contradictions, and to allow people to think ill of us.... These are often helps to humility, and rid us of vainglory.”^{[1024](#)} It is in adversity that we can learn what we really are and what great need we have of God’s help: “What doth he know, that hath not been tried?”^{[1025](#)}

After this purification, pride and its effects will gradually be felt less. A person, instead of letting himself fall into jealousy toward those who have more natural or supernatural qualities, tells himself then that, as St. Paul remarks, the hand ought not be jealous of the eye, but, on the contrary, it should be happy because it benefits from what the eye sees. The same is true in the mystical body of Christ; far from becoming jealous, souls ought to enjoy in a holy manner the qualities they find in their neighbor. Though they do not possess them themselves, they benefit by them. They should rejoice over everything that cooperates in the glory of God and the good of souls. When this is the case, the bandage of pride falls away and the soul’s gaze recovers its simplicity and penetration, which make it enter little by little into the inner life of God.

The Healing of Spiritual Sloth, or Acedia

Among the capital sins, there is one, spiritual sloth, called also acedia, which is directly opposed to the love of God and to the joy that results from generosity in His service. We must discuss it in order to complete what we have said about the active purification of the will and to note exactly the grave confusions made by the quietists on this point.

We shall see, first of all, the general nature of spiritual sloth, then the gravity of this evil and the way to cure it.¹⁰²⁶

THE NATURE OF SPIRITUAL SLOTH, OR ACEDIA

Sloth in general, *pigritia*, is a voluntary and culpable repugnance to work, to effort, and consequently a tendency to idleness, or at least to negligence, to pusillanimity,¹⁰²⁷ which is opposed to generosity or magnanimity.

Sloth is not the languor or torpor in action which comes from poor health; it is an evil disposition of the will and of the sensible appetites, by which one fears and refuses effort, wishes to avoid all trouble, and seeks a *dolce farniente*. It has often been remarked that the slothful man is a parasite, who lives at the expense of others, as tranquil as a woodchuck when he is undisturbed in his idleness, and ill-humored when an effort is made to oblige him to work. This vice begins with unconcern and negligence in work, and manifests itself by a progressive dislike for all serious, physical and mental labor.

When idleness affects the accomplishment of the religious duties necessary to sanctification, it is called acedia.¹⁰²⁸ It is an evil sadness: opposed to spiritual joy, which is the fruit of generosity in the love of God. Acedia is a disgust for spiritual things, a disgust which leads one to perform them negligently, to shorten them, or to omit them under vain pretexts. It is the cause of tepidity.

This sadness, which is radically opposed to that of contrition, depresses the soul and weighs it down because it does not react as it should. Then it reaches a voluntary disgust for spiritual things, because they demand too much effort and self-discipline. Whereas devotion, which is the promptness of the will in the service of God, lifts the soul up, spiritual sloth weighs down and crushes the soul and ends by causing it to find the yoke of the Lord unbearable and to flee the divine light, which reminds it of its duties. St. Augustine says: "Light which is so pleasant to pure eyes, becomes hateful to infirm eyes which can no longer bear it."

This depressing sadness, the result of negligence, and this disgust, which is at least indirectly voluntary, are quite different from the sensible or spiritual aridity which, in divine trials, is accompanied by true contrition for our sins, by fear of offending God, by a keen desire for perfection, by a need of solitude, of recollection, and of the prayer of simple gaze.

St. John of the Cross, referring to the condition of the spiritual man in the passive purification of the senses, says:

We find no comfort in the things of God, and none also in created things... but the memory dwells ordinarily upon God with a painful anxiety and carefulness; the soul thinks it is not serving God, but going backwards, because it is no longer conscious of any sweetness in the things of God. In that case it is clear that this weariness of spirit and aridity are not the results of weakness and lukewarmness; for the peculiarity of lukewarmness is the want of earnestness in, and of interior solicitude for, the things of God. There is, therefore, a great difference between dryness and lukewarmness, for the latter consists in great remissness and weakness of will and spirit, in the want of all solicitude about serving God. The true purgative aridity is accompanied in general by a painful anxiety, because the soul thinks that it is not serving God... For when mere bodily indisposition is the cause, all that it does is to produce disgust and the ruin of bodily health, without the desire of serving God which belongs to the purgative aridity. In this aridity, though the sensual part of man be greatly depressed, weak and sluggish in good works, by reason of the little satisfaction they furnish, the spirit is, nevertheless, ready and strong.¹⁰²⁹

In other words, this divine trial is the privation of accidental devotion alone and not of substantial devotion, which consists in the will to give oneself generously and promptly to the service of God.¹⁰³⁰ Spiritual sloth or acedia, on the contrary, is, by reason of culpable negligence, the privation of substantial devotion itself and at least indirectly voluntary disgust for spiritual things because of the abnegation and effort they demand.

Whereas in the divine trial of which we are speaking, a person suffers because he has distractions and strives to diminish their number, in the state of spiritual sloth a man welcomes them, lets himself glide easily into useless thoughts, and does not react against them. When such is the case, distractions that are at least indirectly voluntary soon invade prayer almost completely; the examination of conscience, which has become annoying, is suppressed; sins are no longer accounted for; and the soul descends farther and farther along the slope of tepidity. It falls into spiritual anaemia in which little by little, with the defects springing from it, the three concupiscences awaken.

The confusion of spiritual sloth with the divine trial of aridity was one of the chief errors of the quietists. For this reason the two following propositions of Molinos were condemned: "Disgust for spiritual things is good; by it the soul is purified, freed

from selflove.” “When the interior soul feels repugnance for discursive meditation on God, for the virtues, when it remains cold, and does not experience any fervor, it is a good sign.”¹⁰³¹ These propositions were condemned as offensive and dangerous in practice. The fact of the matter is certainly that disgust for spiritual things is not at all good, that it is an evil and a sin as soon as it is voluntary, whether directly or indirectly so, by reason of negligence. St. Paul writes to the Romans: “I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercy of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, pleasing unto God.... Loving one another with the charity of brotherhood, with honor preventing one another, in carefulness not slothful, in spirit fervent, serving the Lord. Rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation, instant in prayer.”¹⁰³² How far these words are from the quietism of Molinos!

The latter confounded spiritual sloth with the aridity and dryness of divine trials, not observing that the soul which bears these trials well, far from being slothful, has a keen desire for God and for perfection, and therefore preserves a true, substantial devotion of the will in the absence of sensible devotion of which it is deprived. Molinos confounded sensible and absolutely involuntary disgust for divine things with the disgust which is at least indirectly voluntary and culpable because of sloth and negligence.

St. John of the Cross, on the contrary, in *The Dark Night* gives an excellent description of spiritual sloth. Writing about the imperfections of beginners, he says:

As to spiritual sloth, beginners are wont to find their most spiritual occupations irksome, and avoid them as repugnant to their taste; for, being so given to sweetness in spiritual things, they loathe such occupations when they find no sweetness. If they miss once this sweetness in prayer which is their joy,—it is expedient that God should deprive them of it in order to try them—they will not resume it; at other times they omit it, or return to it with a bad grace. Thus, under the influence of sloth they neglect the way of perfection—which is the denial of their will and pleasure for God—for the gratification of their own will, which they serve rather than the will of God. Many of these will have it that God should will what they will, and are afflicted when they must will what He wills, reluctantly submitting their own will to the will of God. As a result, they often imagine that what is not according to their will is also not according to the will of God; and, on the other hand, when they are pleased, they believe that God is pleased. They measure Him by themselves, and not themselves by Him.... They also find it wearisome to obey when they are commanded to do what they like not; and because they walk in the way of consolation and spiritual sweetness, they are too weak for the rough trials of perfection. They are like persons delicately nurtured who avoid with heavy hearts all that is hard and rugged, and are offended at the cross wherein the joys of the spirit consist. The more spiritual the work they have to do, the more irksome do they feel it to be. And because they insist on having their own way and will in spiritual things, they enter on the “strait way that leadeth unto life” (Matt. 16:25), of which Christ speaks, with repugnance and heaviness of heart.¹⁰³³

Some who abandon prayer say, in order to cloak spiritual sloth: “The sweetness of prayer must be sacrificed to the austerity of study” or of work. If a truly generous person made this statement, it would mean: “One must know how to sacrifice the sweetness of prayer, especially of sensible devotion, to the austerity of the study or the work necessary for the salvation of souls.” But if this statement is made by someone who is losing all true devotion, it does not make sense; for such a one in no way sacrifices the delights of prayer, which he does not experience, and he is only seeking to hide his spiritual sloth under the veil of a relatively exterior work in which he seeks himself. This man flees interior work because of spiritual sloth. True contemplation and union with God should, it is clear, not be sacrificed to study, which is subordinate to them; to do so would be to sacrifice the end for the means. Moreover, study not inspired by the love of God and of souls would, from the spiritual point of view, remain truly fruitless. In short, when a man says, “The sweetness of prayer must be sacrificed to the austerity of work,” he wishes to forget that prayer is often dry. This is why it is more difficult to lead souls to a true life of profound and persevering prayer than to induce them to read and talk about books which appear on the subject. Finally, spiritual sloth not infrequently grows out of an excessive, unsanctified natural activity in which a person takes complacency instead of seeking God and the good of souls in it.

THE GRAVITY OF SPIRITUAL SLOTH AND ITS RESULTS

Spiritual sloth is gravely sinful when it reaches the point of giving up the religious duties necessary for our salvation and sanctification: for example, when it goes so far as to omit the hearing of Mass on Sunday.¹⁰³⁴ When it leads us to omit religious acts of lesser importance without a reason, the sin is only venial; but if we do not struggle against this negligence, it soon becomes more serious, placing us in a genuine state of tepidity or spiritual relaxation. This state is a sort of moral anaemia, in which evil tendencies awaken little by little, seek to prevail, and manifest themselves by numerous deliberate venial sins, which dispose us to still graver faults, just as bodily anaemia prepares the way for the invasion of the germ of a disease, the beginning of a serious illness.

Spiritual sloth or acedia is even, as St. Gregory¹⁰³⁵ and St. Thomas¹⁰³⁶ show, a capital sin, the root of many others. Why is this? Because man seeks material consolations in order to flee from the sadness and disgust which spiritual things inspire in him on account of the renunciation and self-discipline which they demand. As Aristotle says, “No one can long remain in sadness without any joy,”¹⁰³⁷ and then he who deprives himself of all spiritual joy through his own negligence and sloth, does not delay in seeking inferior pleasures.

Consequently, disastrous results follow disgust for spiritual things and for the work of sanctification, a sin which is directly opposed to the love of God and to the holy joy resulting therefrom. When life does not rise toward God, it descends or falls

into evil sadness which oppresses the soul. From this evil sadness, says St. Gregory (loc. cit.), are born malice—and no longer only weakness—rancor toward one's neighbor, pusillanimity in the face of duty to be accomplished, discouragement, spiritual torpor even to the forgetting of the precepts, and finally, dissipation of spirit and the seeking after forbidden things. This seeking after unlawful things manifests itself by the externalization of life, by curiosity, loquacity, uneasiness, instability, and fruitless agitation.¹⁰³⁸ Thus a person arrives at spiritual blindness and the progressive weakening of the will.

Descending this slope, many have lost sight of the grandeur of the Christian vocation, have forgotten the promises they made to God, and have taken the descending road, which at first seems broad, but which grows narrower and narrower, whereas the narrow road, which leads upward, becomes ever wider, immense as God Himself to whom it leads.

In *The Ascent of Mount Carmel*, St. John of the Cross says on this subject: "Dissipation of the mind engenders in its turn spiritual sloth and lukewarmness, which grow into weariness and sadness in divine things, so that in the end we come to hate them."¹⁰³⁹

THE CURE FOR SPIRITUAL SLOTH

Cassian¹⁰⁴⁰ declared that experience proves that a person triumphs over the temptation to spiritual sloth, not by fleeing from it, but by resisting it. On this subject St. Thomas observes: "Sin is ever to be shunned, but the assaults of sin should be overcome, sometimes by flight, sometimes by resistance; by flight, when a continued thought increases the incentive to sin, as in lust;... by resistance, when perseverance in the thought diminishes the incentive to sin, which incentive arises from some trivial consideration. This is the case with sloth, because the more we think about spiritual goods, the more pleasing they become to us, and forthwith sloth dies away."¹⁰⁴¹

We must, therefore, conquer spiritual sloth by real love of God, by true devotion of the will, which ought to subsist in spite of sensible aridity. We must revert again and again to the prolonged consideration of the eternal goods which are promised us.

And to recover the spirit of faith, enthusiasm, and generosity in the love of God, we must every day courageously impose some sacrifices on ourselves in those matters in which we are weakest. It is the first step that costs; but after a week of effort the task becomes easy: for example, to rise at the appointed hour and to be obliging to everybody. All spiritual authors say that one of the remedies for tepidity is frankness with ourselves and with our confessor, a serious examination of conscience every day in order to rise again, the assiduous practice of our religious duties coupled with our duties of state, fidelity to prayer and to the morning offering, which we ought to make to God of all our actions during the day. And since we have little to present to God, let us offer Him frequently the precious blood of Jesus and the interior act of oblation ever living in His heart. Blessed are they who renew this offering when they hear the hour strike, and who offer the fleeting hour that it may bear fruits for eternity, that the moment which is passing may remain in the eternal instant which does not pass.

Above all, some daily sacrifices will restore vigor and tone to our spiritual life. Thus we will gradually recover substantial fervor, promptness of the will in the service of God, even if sensible devotion is lacking, a privation we should accept in order to make reparation for past offenses.

To conquer spiritual sloth and to avoid spiritual instability, we should determine the religious employment of our time: for example, divide the day by the recitation of the parts of the Divine Office, or of the Rosary. Some interior souls divide the week according to the mysteries of faith, the rule of our life: Sunday is consecrated to God by special devotion and thanksgiving to the Blessed Trinity. Monday is consecrated to the mystery of the Incarnation by recalling the *Ecce venio* of Christ and the *Ecce ancilla Domini* of Mary. Tuesday is devoted to the thought of our Savior's hidden life. Wednesday is devoted to His apostolic life. Thursday recalls the institution of the Eucharist and of the priesthood. Friday is consecrated to living the dolorous Passion, to asking for love of the cross. Saturday is given over to the thought of the privileges of Mary, her sorrows, and her role as Mediatrix and Co-redemptrix.

Thus instead of losing time which flees, we recover it and gain it for eternity. And gradually we recover spiritual joy, that of which St. Paul speaks when he writes to the Philippians: "Rejoice in the Lord always; again, I say, rejoice. Let your modesty be known to all men. The Lord is nigh. Be nothing solicitous; but in everything, by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your petitions be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasseth all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus."¹⁰⁴²

Chapter 30

Sacramental Confession

“Receive ye the Holy Ghost. Whose sins you shall forgive, they are forgiven them.” John 20:22 f.

We have seen that the purification of the soul is an effect of the mortification of the senses, of self-will, and of personal judgment; we shall see also that it is an effect of prayer. Moreover, God, in His love for us, has placed within our reach other easy and powerful means to purify us, the sacraments, which operate by themselves, *ex opere operato*, and produce in the soul which has prepared itself by acts of faith and love a much more abundant grace than it would obtain by making the same acts without the sacraments.

However, if the sacraments by themselves, by the divine virtue they contain, have an essential efficacy, the measure of grace produced by them varies according to the dispositions of those who receive them; the more perfect they are, the more abundant is the grace, and the differences between a number of persons receiving the same sacrament are much greater than one ordinarily imagines. The sacrament of penance is one of the most precious means of sanctification; it must be well received, and routine, which would considerably diminish its effect, should be avoided. It is, therefore, important for us to see how we should prepare for sacramental confession, how we should make a good confession, and what are its fruits.

PREPARATION FOR CONFESSION

To prepare worthily for confession, we should examine our consciences and arouse ourselves to contrition.

The examination of conscience requires more care in proportion as the penitent falls into more sins and has little knowledge of his interior state. However, those who each evening examine their principal failings, have no trouble at all in knowing themselves well, and they are thereby stirred to make serious efforts at amendment.

In the case of spiritual persons who confess frequently and who are careful to avoid deliberate venial sins, the examination of conscience, as St. Alphonsus remarks, does not require much time. It is advisable for such a person to ask himself: What remains of this week to be written in God, in the book of life? In what have I acted for God, in what for myself, by yielding to my temperament, my egoism, my pride? When he thus considers the state of his soul from above and asks for light, he often obtains the grace of a penetrating gaze on his own life.

We must distinguish here grave sins, more or less deliberate venial sins, and the faults of frailty.

If a man who tends towards perfection has the misfortune to commit mortal sins in a moment of weakness, he must accuse himself of them sincerely and clearly at the beginning of his confession, without, seeking to cause them to pass unperceived in the multitude of venial sins. He must indicate their number, kind, and cause, and especially have a profound contrition for them accompanied by a firm purpose of avoiding in the future not only the sins themselves, but their occasions and causes. Even after receiving pardon, he must also keep alive in his heart the sincere desire to atone, by an austere life and a generous love, for the evil committed. He should also remember how the Apostle, St. Peter, wept over his denial, humbled himself profoundly, thanked infinite Mercy, and continued on his way even to martyrdom.

An isolated mortal sin, when immediately confessed and atoned for, leaves scarcely any traces in the soul, which may at once resume its ascent from the very spot where it fell, without having to retrace all the road that had already been traveled. Thus he who stumbles midway in an ascent, may, when he picks himself up, promptly continue his climb from the spot which he had reached.

Venial sins committed with full deliberation are a serious obstacle to perfection, especially when they are frequent and the soul is attached to them. They are real maladies, which weaken the Christian soul. “Do not allow sin to grow old in thee,” Christ said to St. Gertrude. Fully deliberate venial sin, when not rejected, is like a poison that is not vomited forth and that, although it does not cause death immediately, acts slowly on the organism. For instance, close attention must be paid to avoid keeping voluntarily any petty rancor, or attachment to one’s own judgment, to self-will, to habits of rash judgment, of slander, of dangerous natural affections that would be a fetter, depriving us of liberty of spirit and all spontaneous movement toward God. When we deliberately refuse the Lord these manifestly demanded sacrifices, we cannot expect from Him the graces that lead to perfection. Consequently we must plainly accuse ourselves of fully deliberate venial sins against charity, humility, the virtue of religion, and so forth, especially those which are most humiliating. Their cause must be sought with a firm resolution to avoid them. Otherwise, of course, there is no longer any real and effective tendency to perfection. This is a point of primary importance.

There are other semi-deliberate venial sins, which are committed with less reflection and into which there enters a certain amount of surprise and impulse, but to which the will adheres with a certain complacency. We must guard against them, especially if they recur frequently; they show that the soul fights too feebly and is not determined to free itself from all obstacles.

Sins of frailty are those committed inadvertently because of human weakness; the will has only a small share in them; it yields momentarily, but promptly disavows its weakness. Sins of this kind cannot be completely and continually avoided, but their number should be diminished. They are not a serious obstacle to perfection because they are quickly atoned for; yet it is well to submit them to the influence of the sacrament of penance because thereby purity of soul will become more complete.¹⁰⁴³

THE CONFESSION ITSELF

Confession should be made with a great spirit of faith, remembering that the confessor holds the place of our Lord. He is a judge, since this sacrament is administered in the form of a judgment: *Ego te absolvo...*; but he is also a spiritual father and a physician, who benevolently points out remedies if the penitent clearly reveals his suffering. Consequently it is not enough to make a vague accusation that would tell the confessor nothing, as for example: I have had distractions in my prayers. It is advisable to say: I have been especially distracted during such and such an exercise of piety through negligence, because I began it badly, without recollection, or because I did not sufficiently combat distractions springing from a petty rancor or from too sensible an affection or from study. It is also fitting to recall resolutions taken and to tell whether we have failed more or less in keeping them. Thus routine and negligence will be avoided.

We need especially to excite contrition and a firm purpose of amendment, its indispensable consequence. To do this, we should think of the genuine motives of contrition, both as regards God and as regards ourselves. We must ask for the grace to see more clearly that sin, no matter how slight it may be, is an offense against God, resistance to His will, resistance which certainly displeases Him; that it is also ingratitude toward the most loving of Fathers, ingratitude so much the greater as we have received more, and by it we refuse to give God an “accidental joy” which we ought to give Him. Our sins have increased the bitterness of the chalice that was offered to Christ in Gethsemane; He could address to us these words of the Psalmist: “For if My enemy had reviled Me, I would verily have borne with it.... But thou a man of one mind, My guide and My familiar, who didst take sweetmeats together with Me.”¹⁰⁴⁴ There we have indeed the motive for contrition with respect to God.

As regards ourselves, there is another motive: venial sin, though it does not of itself diminish charity, takes away its fervor, its liberty of action, and its radiation. Venial sin renders the divine friendship less intimate and less active. To lose the intimacy of a saint would be a great loss; but to lose the intimacy of our Savior is a far greater loss. Moreover, venial sin, especially if deliberate, causes evil inclinations to spring up again in us and thereby disposes us to mortal sin; and in certain matters the attraction to pleasure may easily cause us rapidly to cross the line which separates venial sin from mortal. We have here another motive for sincere contrition.

Confession thus practiced will, especially by virtue of absolution and the counsels of the priest, be a powerful means of purification and progress. Blessed Angela of Foligno, along with many others, exemplifies this purification and progress by means of confession. At the beginning of the book of her visions and instructions, the saint herself relates that when she first took cognizance of her sins she was greatly afraid, trembled at the thought of damnation, wept much, blushed for the first time, put off confessing them; nevertheless she went in this state to the holy table. She says:

With my sins I received the body of Jesus Christ. That is why my conscience did not cease to chide me day or night. I prayed to St. Francis to make me find the confessor I needed, someone who would be able to understand and to whom I could talk.... In the morning I found a friar who was preaching in the church of St. Felician. After the sermon I resolved to make my confession to him. I confessed my sins in full, I received absolution. I did not feel love, only bitterness, shame, and sorrow.

I persevered in the penance imposed on me; devoid of consolation, overwhelmed with sorrow, I tried to satisfy justice.

Then I looked for the first time at divine mercy; I made the acquaintance of that mercy which had withdrawn me from hell, which had given me the grace that I have related. I received its first illumination: my grief and tears redoubled. I gave myself up to severe penance....

Thus enlightened, I perceived only defects in myself; I saw with entire certitude that I had deserved hell.... I received no consolation other than that of being able to weep. An illumination made me see the measure of my sins. Thereupon I understood that, in offending the Creator, I had offended all creatures.... Through the Blessed Virgin and all the saints I invoked the mercy of God and, knowing that I was dead, on my knees I begged for life.... Suddenly I believed that I felt the pity of all creatures and of all the saints. And then I received a gift: a great fire of love and the power to pray as I had never prayed.... I received a profound knowledge of the manner in which Christ died for my sins. I felt my own sins very cruelly, and I perceived that I was the author of the crucifixion. But as yet I had no idea of the immensity of the benefit of the cross....

Then the Lord in His pity appeared to me several times, in sleep or in vigil, crucified: “Look,” He said to me, “Look at My wounds.” He counted the blows of the scourging and said to me: “It is for thee, for thee, for thee.”... I begged the Blessed Virgin and St. John to obtain the sufferings of Jesus Christ for me, at least those which were given to them. They obtained this favor for me, and one day St. John so loaded me with them that I count that day among the most terrible of my life.... God wrote the Pater Noster in my heart with such an accentuation of His goodness and of my unworthiness that I lack words to speak of it.

By this very profound contrition, Blessed Angela entered on the way of sanctity. These great graces should draw our attention to the value of the aids which God offers us daily, to matters of import in the ordinary Christian life.

THE FRUITS OF CONFESSION

The fruits of confession are those of the virtues of humility and penance and especially those of sacramental absolution.

What truer and more indispensable act of humility is there than the sincere confession of sins committed? It is the remedy of the vice of pride, the root of all sin. Therefore heresy, which is the fruit of pride, suppressed confession, as we see in Protestantism. In a humble confession there is a beginning of atonement for sins of pride.

The act of penance, which is contrition, regrets sin, disavows it because it displeases God and separates us from Him. By contrition the soul is converted, turns back to the Lord from whom it had turned away by mortal sin, or from whom it had strayed by venial sin. It draws near to Him and with confidence and love throws itself, so to speak, into the arms of mercy.

Above all, the blood of the Savior is sacramentally poured out on our souls by sacramental absolution. The Protestant never experiences, after committing sins that may torment him, the consolation of hearing the minister of God say to him in the name of the Lord, speaking in merciful judgment: *Ego te absolvo*. He has not the consolation of thus being able to apply to himself Christ's words to the apostles: "Whose sins you shall forgive, they are forgiven them."¹⁰⁴⁵ On the contrary, by these words the blood of Christ is sacramentally poured out on our souls by absolution; it is like a salutary balm which, adding its power to that of the virtues of humility and penance, remits sins, greatly assists complete healing, and helps the soul to recover its lost strength.

"By confession," says St. Francis de Sales, "you not only receive absolution from venial sins you confess, but likewise strength to avoid them, light to discern them well, and grace to repair all the damage you may have sustained by them."¹⁰⁴⁶

We must not forget, however, that the effects of absolution are always in proportion to the excellence of the dispositions with which the sacrament is received. As St. Thomas says,¹⁰⁴⁷ If a man who has five talents and loses them by mortal sin, has only sufficient contrition, he does not recover the merits lost in the degree that he had before his fall; he may recover three talents. If he has a more profound sorrow for his sins, he may again receive the five talents that he lost; or even, with a superior fervor of contrition, he will receive more, six, for instance. Such seems to have been the contrition of St. Peter after his denial of Christ; from that time on he was very generously faithful to grace, which led him even to martyrdom.

Among twenty people who go to confession, each receives a different measure of grace, for God discerns in each one's acts difference; which no one on earth suspects. There are many different degrees of humility, contrition, and love of God, which are more or less pure and more or less strong. They are as so many degrees of intensity of a flame.

The same principles apply to sacramental satisfaction, the effect of which depends on the sacrament, at the same time being proportioned to the fervor with which it is accomplished. Sacramental satisfaction has thus more value than a satisfaction that is not sacramental, though the first may be more or less fruitful according to our generosity. It thus obtains for us in varying degrees the remission of the punishment due to forgiven sins. This satisfaction or penance should, therefore, not be put off to a later date, but performed at once, while we thank God for the grace of absolution. The blood of Jesus flowed over our soul to purify it; we should pray that He may grant us to remain in the state of grace and to die in this state. Only the saints have a profound understanding of the value of the blood of the Savior; this penetrating illumination on the depths of the mystery of the redemption is an immense grace.

Finally, it is fitting to accuse ourselves, at least in general, of the sins of our past life, especially of the most serious sins, in order to have a greater contrition for them so that the application of the merits of Jesus Christ to these sins, that have already been forgiven, may diminish the temporal punishment, which almost always remains after absolution. Let us also say with the Psalmist: "From my secret ones cleanse me, O Lord."¹⁰⁴⁸ Cleanse me, O Lord, from my secret sins that are indirectly voluntary by reason of my negligence to know and to will what I ought to know and will.

Confession made thus with a spirit of faith is manifestly a great means of sanctification. Our Lord said to St. Veronica Juliani: "Thou shalt make progress in perfection in proportion to the fruits which thou shalt draw from this sacrament."

In a little work on confession, St. Francis de Sales remarks: "Listen attentively... in order to hear in spirit the words of absolution that the Savior Himself pronounces in heaven over your soul... at the same time that His priest absolves you in His name here on earth."¹⁰⁴⁹

In the same work, he adds: "There is no character so untractable which, first of all by the grace of God, then by industry and diligence, cannot be subdued and conquered. For that reason, follow the orders and guidance of the prudent and zealous director."¹⁰⁵⁰

To conclude with St. Francis de Sales,¹⁰⁵¹ let us note that the sadness of true contrition, that is, displeasure with evil and detestation of it, is never a vexing, fretful sadness which depresses, but, on the contrary, it is a holy sadness that makes the soul prompt and diligent, that uplifts the heart by prayer and hope, that leads it to outbursts of fervor: "It is a sadness which in the

height of its bitterness always produces the sweetness of an incomparable consolation, according to the precept of the great St. Augustine: ‘The penitent should ever grieve and rejoice at his grief.’ “[1052](#)

If this sadness of contrition at the memory of past sins has this sweetness, it is because it springs from charity. The more a man grieves for his sins, the more certain it is that he loves God. This sadness, which is not vexation and melancholy, is good; it is compunction or lively sorrow for having sinned, sorrow in which are found the fruits of the Holy Ghost: namely, charity, joy, peace, patience, benignity, goodness, longanimity, mildness, faith, modesty, continency, and chastity.[1053](#)

Assistance at Mass, the Source of Sanctification

The sanctification of our soul is found in a daily more intimate union with God, a union of faith, confidence, and love. Since this is true, one of the greatest means of sanctification is the highest act of the virtue of religion and of Christian worship, participation in the Sacrifice of the Mass. For every interior soul, the Mass ought each morning to be the eminent source from which spring the graces we need in the course of the day, the source of light and of warmth, similar, in the spiritual order, to the sunrise in the order of nature. After the night and sleep, which are an image of death, the sun reappearing each morning restores, so to speak, life to all that awakens on the surface of the earth. If we had a profound understanding of the value of daily Mass, we would see that it is like a spiritual sunrise that renews, preserves, and increases in our souls the life of grace, which is eternal life begun. Too often, however, the habit of assisting at Mass degenerates into routine for want of a spirit of faith, and then we no longer receive from the Holy Sacrifice all the fruits that we should. Yet the Mass ought to be the greatest act of each of our days, and in the life of a Christian, more notably of a religious, all other daily acts, especially all the other prayers and little sacrifices that we ought to offer to God in the course of the day, should be only the accompaniment of that act.

We shall consider here: (1) what constitutes the value of the Sacrifice of the Mass; (2) the relation of its effects to our interior dispositions; (3) the way we should unite ourselves to the Eucharistic sacrifice.

THE OBLATION EVER LIVING IN THE HEART OF CHRIST

The excellence of the Sacrifice of the Mass, says the Council of Trent,¹⁰⁵⁴ comes from the fact that it is the same sacrifice in substance as that of the cross, because it is the same Priest who continues to offer Himself by His ministers; it is the same Victim, really present on the altar, who is really offered; only the manner of offering differs: whereas on the cross there was a bloody immolation, there is in the Mass, in virtue of the double consecration, a sacramental immolation through the separation, not physical but sacramental, of the body and blood of Christ. Thus the blood of Jesus, without being physically shed, is sacramentally shed.¹⁰⁵⁵

This sacramental immolation is a sign¹⁰⁵⁶ of the interior oblation of Christ, to which we should unite ourselves; it is also the memorial of the bloody immolation of Calvary. Although it is only sacramental, this immolation of the Word of God made flesh is more expressive than the bloody immolation of the paschal lamb and of all the victims of the Old Testament. As a matter of fact, a sign draws its value as a sign from the grandeur of the thing signified: the flag, which reminds us of our country, even though it may be made of common material, has greater value in our eyes than the particular flag of a company or the insignia of an officer. Likewise the bloody immolation of the victims of the Old Testament, a remote figure of the sacrifice of the cross, expressed only the interior sentiments of the priests and faithful of the Old Law; whereas the sacramental immolation of the Savior on our altars expresses especially the interior oblation ever living in the heart of Christ “always living to make intercession for us.”¹⁰⁵⁷

This oblation, which is the soul of the Sacrifice of the Mass, has an infinite value, which it draws from the divine person of the Word made flesh, principal Priest and Victim, whose immolation continues under a sacramental form. St. John Chrysostom writes:

“When you see the ordained priest at the altar raising the sacred host toward heaven, do not believe that this man is the true (principal) priest, but, raising your thoughts above what strikes the senses, consider the hand of Jesus Christ invisibly extended.”¹⁰⁵⁸ The priest whom we see with our eyes of flesh cannot penetrate all the depths of this mystery, but above him there is the intellect and will of Christ, the principal Priest. If the minister is not always what he should be, the principal Priest is infinitely holy; if the minister, even though very good, may be slightly distracted or occupied with the exterior ceremonies of the sacrifice, without penetrating their inmost meaning, there is above him One who is not distracted and who offers to God with full knowledge reparatory adoration of infinite value, supplication and thanksgiving of limitless power.

This interior oblation ever living in the heart of Christ is therefore, so to speak, the soul of the Sacrifice of the Mass. It is the continuation of that oblation by which Jesus offered Himself as a victim on His entrance into this world and throughout the course of His earthly existence, especially on the cross. When Christ was on earth, this oblation was meritorious; now it continues without the modality of merit. It continues under the form of reparatory adoration and of supplication in order to apply to us the past merits of the cross. Even after the last Mass has been said at the end of the world, and when there will no longer be any sacrifice, properly so called, but only its consummation, the interior oblation of Christ to His Father will endure,

no longer under the form of reparation and intercession, but under that of adoration and thanksgiving. We are made to foresee this by the Sanctus, Sanctus, Sanctus, which gives us some idea of the worship of the blessed in eternity.

How great our admiration would be, were it given to us to see without intermediary the love which inspires this interior oblation continuing unceasingly in the heart of Christ, “always living to make intercession for us”!

Blessed Angela of Foligno tells us: “I have not a vague thought, but the absolute certitude that if a soul saw and contemplated any of the intimate splendors of the sacrament of the altar, it would take fire, for it would see divine love. It seems to me that those who offer the sacrifice, or who take part in it, ought to meditate profoundly on the deep truth of the thrice holy mystery, in the contemplation of which we should remain motionless and absorbed.”¹⁰⁵⁹

THE EFFECTS OF THE SACRIFICE OF THE MASS AND OUR INTERIOR DISPOSITIONS

The interior oblation of Christ Jesus, which is the soul of the Eucharistic sacrifice, has the same end and the same effects as the sacrifice of the cross; but among these effects a distinction must be made between those that relate to God and those that concern us.

The effects of the Mass which relate immediately to God, such as reparatory adoration and thanksgiving, are always infallibly and wholly produced with their infinite value, even without our concurrence, even if the Mass, provided that it be valid, should be celebrated by an unworthy priest. From each Mass there rise thus toward God adoration and thanksgiving of limitless value, by reason of the dignity of the principal Priest who offers it and of the value of the Victim offered. This oblation pleases God more than all sins taken together displease Him; this is what constitutes the very essence of the mystery of the redemption in its aspect as satisfaction.¹⁰⁶⁰

The effects of the Mass which relate to us are poured forth on us only in the measure of our interior dispositions. It is thus that the Mass, as a propitiatory sacrifice, obtains *ex opere operato* for sinners who do not resist it the actual grace which leads them to repent and inspires them to confess their sins.¹⁰⁶¹ The words *Agnus Dei, qui tollis peccata mundi, miserere nobis*, produce in sinners who oppose no obstacle sentiments of contrition, as the sacrifice of the cross produced them in the soul of the good thief. Here we are especially concerned with sinners who assist at Mass or with those for whom it is said.

The sacrifice of the Mass, as a sacrifice of satisfaction, also infallibly remits to repentant sinners at least a part of the temporal punishment due to sin. This remission is in proportion to the more or less perfect dispositions with which they assist at Mass. For this reason, says the Council of Trent, the Eucharistic sacrifice can also be offered for the deliverance of the souls in purgatory.¹⁰⁶²

Finally, as a sacrifice of impetration or supplication, the Mass obtains for us *ex opere operato* all the graces we need for our sanctification. It is the great enduring prayer for us of the ever-living Christ, accompanied by the prayer of the Church, His spouse. The effect of this double prayer is proportionate to our fervor, and he who unites himself with it to the best of his ability is sure to obtain the most abundant graces for himself and those dear to him.

According to St. Thomas and many theologians, the effects of the Mass which relate to us are limited only by the measure of our fervor.¹⁰⁶³ The reason for this is that the influence of a universal cause is limited only by the capacity of the subjects that receive it. Thus the sun equally illumines and warms a thousand persons as well as it does one at one place. Now the Sacrifice of the Mass, being substantially the same as that of the cross, is, in its aspect as reparation and prayer, a universal cause of graces of light, attraction, and strength. Its influence on men is, therefore, limited only by the dispositions or the fervor of those who receive it. Thus a single Mass can be as profitable for a great number of persons as if it were offered for one alone among them; just as the sacrifice of the cross was not less profitable to the good thief than if it had been offered for him alone. If the sun warms a thousand persons at one place as well as a single one, the influence of the Mass, the source of spiritual warmth, is certainly not less in its order. The greater the faith, confidence, piety, and love, with which one assists at it, the greater are the fruits he draws from it.

All that we have said shows us why the saints, in the light of the gifts of the Holy Ghost, have always so greatly appreciated the Sacrifice of the Mass. Some, although infirm and ill, dragged themselves to Mass because it is worth more than all treasures. On her way to Chinon, St. Joan of Arc importuned her companions in arms and, by dint of persistent entreaty, wrung from them a promise to assist daily at Mass. St. Germaine Cousin was so strongly attracted toward the church when she heard the bell announcing the Holy Sacrifice that she would leave her sheep in the care of the angels and run to assist at Mass: and her flock was always well guarded. The holy Cure of Ars spoke of the value of the Mass with such conviction that practically all of his parishioners assisted at it. Many other saints shed tears of love or fell into ecstasy during the Eucharistic sacrifice; some saw our Lord Himself, the principal Priest, in the place of the celebrant. Others, at the elevation of the chalice, saw the precious blood overflow, as if it were going to pour out over the arms of the priest into the sanctuary, and angels come with golden chalices to catch it, as if to carry it wherever there are men to be saved. St. Philip Neri, who received graces of this kind, used to celebrate Mass with only his server present, because of the raptures that often seized him at the altar.

What St. Thomas says about attention in vocal prayer may be applied to assistance at Mass: “There are three kinds of attention that can be brought to vocal prayer: one which attends to the words, lest we say them wrong; another which attends to the sense of the words; and a third which attends to the end of prayer, namely, God, and to the thing we are praying for. This last kind of attention is most necessary, and even uneducated persons are capable of it. Moreover, this attention, whereby the mind is fixed on God, is sometimes so strong that the mind forgets everything else.”¹⁰⁶⁴

We may use different ways to assist well at Mass, with faith, confidence, true piety, and love. We can be attentive to the liturgical prayers, which are generally beautiful and full of unction, elevation, and simplicity. We can also recall the passion and death of the Savior, of which the Mass is the memorial, and think of ourselves as standing at the foot of the cross with Mary, John, and the holy women. Again, we can apply ourselves to rendering to God, in union with Christ, the four duties that are the ends of the sacrifice: adoration, reparation, petition, and thanksgiving.¹⁰⁶⁵ Provided we pray, even while piously saying the Rosary, we assist fruitfully at Mass. We may, like St. Jane de Chantal and many saints, with great profit continue our mental prayer during the Mass, especially if we are inclined to a pure and intense love, somewhat like St. John resting on the breast of Jesus at the Last Supper.

But whatever way we follow the Mass, one important point must be insisted upon. We must, above all, unite ourselves profoundly with the oblation of Christ, the principal Priest; with Him we must offer Him to His Father, remembering that this oblation pleases God more than all sins displease Him. We should offer ourselves also more profoundly each day; offer particularly the trials and contradictions that we already have to bear and those that may present themselves in the course of the day. Thus at the offertory the priest says: “*In spiritu humilitatis et in animo contrito suscipiamur a te, Domine.*”

The author of *The Imitation* rightly insists on this point. He has Christ say: “As I willingly offered Myself to God the Father for thy sins, with My hands stretched out upon the cross, even so oughtest thou willingly to offer thyself to Me daily in the Mass, as intimately as thou canst with thy whole energies and affections, for a pure and holy oblation.... Whatsoever thou givest except thyself, I regard not; for I seek not the gift but thyself.... But if thou wilt stand upon self, and not offer thyself freely to My will, thy offering is not complete, nor will there be an entire union between us.”¹⁰⁶⁶

In the following chapter, the faithful soul replies: “Lord, in the simplicity of my heart, I offer myself to Thee this day, as Thy servant for evermore.... Receive me with this sacred oblation of Thy precious body.... I offer also to Thee all my good works, though very few and imperfect, that Thou mayest amend and sanctify them.... I offer to Thee also all the pious desires of devout persons; the necessities of my parents, friends, brothers, sisters, and all those that are dear to me.... I offer up also to Thee prayers and this sacrifice of propitiation for them in particular who have in any way injured me or have inflicted upon me any hurt or injury; and for all those likewise whom I have at any time grieved, troubled, oppressed, or scandalized, by words or deeds, knowingly or unknowingly; that it may please Thee to forgive us all our sins and mutual offenses... ‘. Grant us so to live that we may be worthy to enjoy Thy grace and that we may attain unto life everlasting.”¹⁰⁶⁷

The Mass thus understood is a fruitful source of sanctification, of ever new graces; by it Christ’s prayer may be better realized for us daily: “The glory which Thou hast given Me, I have given to them; that they may be one, as We also are one: I in them, and Thou in Me; that they may be made perfect in one: and the world may know that Thou hast sent Me, and hast loved them, as Thou hast also loved Me.”¹⁰⁶⁸

Our visit to the Blessed Sacrament should remind us of the morning’s Mass, and we should call to mind that though there is no sacrifice, properly so called, for it ceases with the Mass, Christ really present in the tabernacle continues to adore, to pray, and to give thanks. At every hour of the day we ought to unite ourselves to our Savior’s oblation. As the prayer to the Eucharistic heart says: “He is patient in waiting for us, eager to hear and grant our prayers. He is the fountain of ever new graces, the refuge of the hidden life, the master of the secrets of divine union.” In the presence of the tabernacle, we ought “to be silent in order to listen to Him, and leave ourselves in order to lose ourselves in Him.”

Chapter 32

Holy Communion

The soul tending to Christian perfection ought to live more and more by the Eucharist, not only by assistance at Mass but by frequent and even daily Communion. This is our reason for speaking of this living bread and of the conditions of a good and then of a fervent Communion.

THE EUCHARIST, THE LIVING BREAD COME DOWN FROM HEAVEN

For the salvation of all of us in general, our Lord could not have given Himself more than He did on the cross; and He cannot give Himself to each one of us in particular more than He has done in the Eucharist. Because He knew our deepest spiritual needs, He said to us in His promise of the Eucharist: “I am the bread of life. He that cometh to Me shall not hunger: and he that believeth in Me shall never thirst.... I am the living bread which came down from heaven. If any man eat of this bread, he shall live forever; and the bread that I will give is My flesh, for the life of the world.... For My flesh is meat indeed.... He that eateth My flesh and drinketh My blood abideth in Me, and I in him.”¹⁰⁶⁹

The Eucharist is thus the greatest of the sacraments, for it contains not only grace, but the Author of grace. It is the sacrament of love, because it is the fruit of love that gives itself and because it has for its principal effect to increase in us the love of God and of souls in God.

The reception of the Eucharist is called Communion, or the intimate union of the heart of God with the heart of man. This union nourishes the soul and supernaturally vivifies it more and more and, so to speak, deifies it, by increasing in it sanctifying grace, which is a participation in the inner life of God: “For My flesh is meat indeed.”

All created life needs to be fed: plants draw their nourishment from the secretions of the earth; animals feed on plants or other living creatures; man nourishes his body with material and appropriate food; he nourishes his mind with truth, especially divine truth; he should nourish his will with the divine will to be accomplished daily in order to reach eternal life. In other words, man ought to find his nourishment especially in faith, hope, and love. The acts of these virtues obtain for him, through merit, an increase in supernatural life.

But the Savior offers him still another and more divine food; He offers Himself as the food of souls. To St. Augustine, Christ said: “I am the food of the strong; grow and thou shalt feed on Me. But thou shalt not convert Me into thyself as the nourishment of thy body, but thou shalt be changed into Me.”¹⁰⁷⁰

In Communion, the Savior has nothing to gain: it is the soul that receives, that is vivified, supernaturalized; the virtues of Jesus Christ pass into it; it is, as it were, incorporated in Him and becomes a more living member of His mystical body.

How is this incorporation and transformation effected? Especially because Christ, present in the Eucharist, leads the soul to a purer and stronger love of God.

The effects of this food are well explained by St. Thomas, who says: “This sacrament works in man the effect which Christ’s passion wrought in the world.”¹⁰⁷¹ Then he adds: “This sacrament does for the spiritual life all that material food does for the bodily life, namely, by sustaining, giving increase, restoring, and giving delight.”¹⁰⁷²

First of all, it sustains. He who in the natural order does not take food or who takes insufficient food, declines; in the spiritual order the same is true of the man who refuses the Eucharistic bread which the Lord offers us as the best food for our soul. Why deprive ourselves, without reason, of this “supersubstantial bread,”¹⁰⁷³ which is the daily bread of our souls?

As material bread restores the organism by repairing its losses, the results of labor and fatigue, so the Eucharist repairs the gradual loss of strength which results from our negligences. As the Council of Trent says, it frees us from venial sins, restores to us the fervor which we lost because of these sins, and preserves us from mortal sin.

Moreover, ordinary nourishment increases the life of the body in a growing child. Now, from the spiritual point of view, we ought always to grow in the love of God and of our neighbor until death; thus we advance in our journey toward eternity. That we may grow in this way, the Eucharistic bread always brings us new graces. Thus supernatural growth does not stop in the saints as long as they continue on their way toward God: their faith becomes daily more enlightened and more lively, their hope more firm, their charity more pure and ardent. Little by little they advance from resignation in suffering to the esteem and love of the cross. Through Communion all the infused virtues grow with charity; and through ever more fervent Communions, they may reach a heroic degree. The gifts of the Holy Ghost, being permanent, infused dispositions connected with charity, also grow with it.

Lastly, as material bread is pleasant to the taste, the Eucharistic bread is sweet to the faithful soul, which draws from it a comfort and sometimes a spiritual well-being that is more or less felt.

The author of *The Imitation* says: “Confiding, O Lord, in Thy goodness and in Thy great mercy, I come as a sick man to my Savior, hungry and thirsty to the fountain of life, needy to the King of heaven, a servant to my Lord, a creature to my Creator, and one in desolation to my loving Comforter.”¹⁰⁷⁴ “Give Thyself to me, and it is enough; for without Thee no comfort is of any avail. Without Thee I cannot exist; and without Thy visitation I am unable to live.”¹⁰⁷⁵

St. Thomas admirably expresses the mystery of Communion:

“O res mirabilis, manducat Dominum
Pauper, servus, et humilis!”

Communion is the sublime union of supreme wealth and poverty. And yet, how sad it is that habit, degenerating into routine, often prevents us from being attentive to the supernatural splendor of this infinite gift!

CONDITIONS OF A GOOD COMMUNION

The conditions of a good communion are indicated in the decree (December 20, 1905) by which Pope Pius X exhorted all the faithful to frequent Communion. This decree recalls first of all this principle: “The sacraments of the New Law, while acting *ex opere operato*, nevertheless produce a greater effect by reason of the more perfect dispositions of those who receive them.... Care must be taken, therefore, that an attentive preparation precede Holy Communion and that a suitable thanksgiving follow it, taking into consideration the faculties and condition of each person.”

According to the same decree, the first and indispensable condition for drawing profit from Communion is an upright and pious intention. On this point His Holiness declared: “Frequent and daily Communion, greatly desired by Jesus Christ and by the Catholic Church, should be so accessible to all the faithful of every rank and condition, that anyone who is in the state of grace and approaches the holy table with an upright and pious intention, may not be separated from it by any prohibition. Upright intention consists in this: that he who approaches the holy table is not influenced by custom, by vanity, or by any human reason, but desires to satisfy the good pleasure of God, to be more closely united to Him by charity, and by means of this divine medicine to remedy his infirmities and defects.”

Evidently the upright and pious intention mentioned here must be supernatural, that is, inspired by a motive of faith; it is the desire to acquire the strength to serve God better and to keep from sin. If, with this principal intention, a person had a secondary intention of vanity, such as the desire to be praised, this secondary and nondeterminant motive would not prevent the Communion from being good and would not render it bad, but it would diminish its fruit. This fruit is so much the greater as the upright and pious intention is purer and stronger. These principles are positive. One very fervent Communion is, therefore, more fruitful in itself alone than many, tepid Communions.

THE CONDITIONS OF A FERVENT COMMUNION

In her Dialogue, St. Catherine states the conditions of a fervent Communion by using a striking figure:

If thou hast a light, and the whole world should come to thee in order to take light from it, the light itself does not diminish, and yet each person has it all. It is true that everyone participates more or less in this light, according to the substance into which each one receives the fire. Suppose that there are many who bring their candles, one weighing an ounce, others two or six ounces, or a pound, or even more, and light them in the flame; in each candle, whether large or small, is the whole light, that is to say, the heat, the color, and the flame; nevertheless thou wouldst judge that he whose candle weighs an ounce has less of the light than he whose candle weighs a pound. Now the same thing happens to those who receive this sacrament. Each one carries his own candle, that is, the holy desire with which he receives this sacrament, which of itself is without light, and lights it by receiving this sacrament.¹⁰⁷⁶

How is this desire shown? The holy desire, which is the condition of a fervent Communion, should manifest itself first in removing all attachment to venial sin, slander, jealousy, vanity, sensuality, and so on. This attachment is less reprehensible in poorly enlightened Christians than in those who have already received much and are ungrateful. If this negligence and ingratitude were to become accentuated, they would render Communion less and less fruitful.

That Communion may be fervent, attachment to imperfections must be combated; that is, attachment to an imperfect manner of acting, such as characterizes the actions of one who, possessing five talents, acts as if he had only three (*modo remisso*), and only struggles feebly against his defects. Attachment to imperfections may also be found in the seeking after permissible but useless natural satisfactions, such as taking some refreshment which one can get along without. The sacrifice of these satisfactions would be agreeable to God; and the soul, by thus evidencing greater generosity, would receive many more graces in Communion. It ought to remember that it has as a model Christ Himself, who sacrificed Himself even to the death of the cross, and that it ought to work for its salvation and that of its neighbor by means similar to those which the Savior employed. The removal of venial sin and imperfection is a negative disposition.

The positive dispositions for a fervent Communion are humility (*Domine, non sum dignus*), a profound respect for the Eucharist, a living faith, an ardent desire to receive our Lord, the bread of life.

All these positive conditions may be summed up as hunger for the Eucharist.

All food is good when we are hungry. A rich man, accidentally deprived of food and famished, is happy to find black bread; he thinks it is the best meal of his life and he feels refreshed. If we hungered for the Eucharist, our Communion would be most fruitful. We should recall what this hunger was in St. Catherine of Siena; so great was it that one day when she had been harshly refused Communion, a particle of the large host became detached at the moment when the priest broke it in two, and was miraculously brought to the saint in response to the ardor of her desire.

How can we have this hunger for the Eucharist? The answer lies in our being firmly convinced that the Eucharist is the indispensable food of our soul and in generously making some sacrifices every day.

For those who are feeble, substantial food is sought which will restore their health; efforts are also made to raise the morale of the discouraged. The food par excellence, which renews spiritual strength, is the Eucharist. Our sensible appetites, inclined to sensuality and to sloth, need to be vivified by contact with the virginal body of Christ, who endured most frightful sufferings for love of us. We, who are always inclined to pride, to lack of consideration, to forgetfulness of the greatest truths, to spiritual folly, need to be illumined by contact with the sovereignly luminous intellect of the Savior, who is “the way, the truth, and the life.” Our will also has its deficiencies; it lacks energy, it is cold because it lacks love. This is the cause of all its weaknesses. Who can restore to it the ardor, the flame necessary to its life so that it may ascend instead of descending? The answer is contact with the Eucharistic heart of Jesus, ardent furnace of charity, immutably fixed in the good, and source of merits of infinite value. Of its plenitude we must all receive, and grace for grace. We have great need of this union with the Savior, which is the principal effect of Communion.

If we were profoundly convinced that the Eucharist is the necessary food of our souls, we would have the spiritual hunger which is found in the saints.

To recover it, if we have lost it, we must “take exercise,” as they say to people who are stricken with a languorous illness. Spiritual exercise in this case consists in daily offering sacrifices to God; in particular we should give up seeking ourselves in what we do; gradually, as egoism disappears, charity will take the first, uncontested place in our souls. We will cease to be preoccupied with the little nothings that concern us in order to think more of the glory of God and the salvation of souls. Then the hunger for the Eucharist will return. To make a good Communion, we should also ask Mary to make us share in the love with which she herself received the Eucharist from the hands of St. John.

The fruits of a fervent Communion are proportionate to the generosity of our dispositions. We read in Holy Scripture: “He that hath, to him shall be given, and he shall abound.”¹⁰⁷⁷ In the Office of the Blessed Sacrament, St. Thomas relates that the prophet Elias, who was being persecuted, stopped worn out in the desert and lay down under a juniper tree to await death. He fell asleep; then an angel of the Lord wakened him, showed him a loaf of bread under the ashes, and a jug of water. He ate and drank, and with the strength that this food gave him, he walked for forty days, even to Mount Horeb, where the Lord was waiting for him. This is a figure of the effects of fervent Communion.

We should remember that each of our Communions ought to be substantially more fervent than the preceding one, since each ought not only to preserve charity in us, but to increase it, and consequently dispose us to receive our Lord on the following day with an even greater love than on the preceding day. As a stone falls so much the more rapidly as it approaches the earth which attracts it, so, says St. Thomas,¹⁰⁷⁸ souls ought to advance so much the more rapidly toward God as they approach nearer to Him and are more drawn by Him. This law of acceleration, which is at one and the same time a law of nature and a law of the order of grace, ought to be verified especially by daily Communion. It would be verified if some attachment to venial sin or to imperfection placed no obstacle to it. We see it realized in the lives of the saints, who make much more rapid progress during the last years of their lives than during the earlier years. This is notably true of the end of St. Thomas’ life. Such acceleration in progress toward God was realized above all in Mary, the model of Eucharistic devotion; each of her Communions was certainly more fervent than the preceding one.

God grant that there may be in us at least a remote resemblance to this spiritual progress, and that, if sensible fervor is lacking, substantial fervor, which is the promptness of the will in the service of God, may not fail.

The author of *The Imitation* says: “For who, humbly approaching the fountain of sweetness, does not carry thence some little sweetness? Or who, standing by a great fire, does not derive therefrom some little heat? And Thou art a fountain ever full and overflowing; Thou art a fire always burning and never failing.”¹⁰⁷⁹

This source of graces is so lofty and so fruitful that the properties of refreshing water and the opposite qualities of burning fire may be compared to it. What is divided in material things is united in the spiritual life, and especially in the Eucharist, which contains not only abundant grace, but the very Author of grace.

In our Communions let us think of St. John, who rested his head on the heart of Christ, and of St. Catherine of Siena, who more than once drank long draughts from the wound of His heart, which is ever open in order to show us His love. These

extraordinary graces are given by God from time to time to draw our attention to what is most intrinsic and fruitful in daily Christian life, to what would exist in ours if we only knew how to answer God's call with generosity.

EXAMINATION OF CONSCIENCE: COMMUNIONS WITHOUT THANKSGIVING

"If thou didst know the gift of God!" John 4: 10

A number of interior souls have told us of the sorrow they feel when they see, in certain places, almost the entire body of the faithful leave the church immediately after the end of the Mass during which they have received Holy Communion. Moreover, this custom is becoming general, even in many Catholic boarding schools and colleges where formerly the students who had received Communion remained in the chapel for about ten minutes after Mass, thus acquiring the habit of making a thanksgiving, a habit which the best among them kept all their lives.

Formerly to show the necessity of thanksgiving, people were told how St. Philip Neri had two altar boys, carrying lighted candles, accompany a lady who left the church immediately after the end of the Mass during which she had received Holy Communion. How many times this well deserved lesson was told, and how often it bore fruit! But nowadays people have acquired the habit of treating almost everybody, superiors as well as equals and inferiors, and even our Lord Himself, with easy familiarity. If this abuse continues, there will be, as someone has said, many Communion and few real communicants. If zealous souls do not set to work to stop this habit of unconcern, it will go on increasing, gradually destroying all spirit of mortification and of true and solid piety. And yet Christ Himself is ever the same, and our duty of gratitude toward Him has not changed.

Is not thanksgiving for a favor received a duty, and ought it not be proportionate to the value of the favor? When we give something valuable to a friend, we are rightfully grieved if that person does not take the trouble to send us a word of thanks. Yet this fault is frequent today. And if this easy carelessness, which borders on ingratitude, wounds us, what must be said of ingratitude toward our Lord, whose gifts are incomparably more precious than ours?

When, after the miraculous cure of the ten lepers, only one of them returned to thank our Lord, He asked: "And where are the other nine?" They had been miraculously healed, but did not return to express their thanks.

In Communion we receive a gift far superior to the miraculous cure of a physical disease; we receive the Author of salvation and an increase of the life of grace, which is the seed of glory, or eternal life begun. We receive an increase of charity, the highest of the virtues, which vivifies, animates all the others, and is the very principle of merit.

Christ often gave thanks to His Father for all His benefits, in particular for that of the redemptive Incarnation; with all His soul He thanked His Father for having revealed its mystery to little ones. On the cross He thanked Him while uttering His *Consummatus est*. In the Sacrifice of the Mass, of which He is the principal Priest, He does not cease to thank Him. Thanksgiving is one of the four ends of the sacrifice, always united to adoration, petition, and reparation. Even after the end of the world, when the last Mass has been said and when there will no longer be any sacrifice, properly so called, but only its consummation, when supplication and reparation have ceased, the worship of adoration and thanksgiving will endure forever, expressed in the Sanctus, which will be the song of the elect for all eternity.

With these thoughts in mind, we can easily understand why for some time many interior souls have been having Masses offered in thanksgiving, particularly on the second Friday of the month, in order to make up for the ingratitude of men and of many Christians, who scarcely know any more how to give thanks, even after receiving the greatest benefits.

If there is one favor, however, which demands a special act of thanksgiving, it is the institution of the Eucharist, through which Christ willed to remain substantially among us that He might continue in a sacramental manner the oblation of His sacrifice, and that He might give Himself to us as food to nourish our souls in a better and more substantial way than the best of food can nourish our body. Here it is not a question of feeding our minds on the thought of a St. Augustine or of a St. Thomas, but of feeding ourselves on Jesus Christ, on His humanity, on the plenitude of grace in His holy soul, personally united to the Word and to the Divinity. By the Eucharist, He gives Himself to us that he may assimilate us to Himself. Blessed Nicholas of Flue used to say: "Lord Jesus, take me from myself and give me to Thyself." Let us add: "Lord Jesus, give Thyself to me, that I may belong entirely to Thee." The Blessed Eucharist is the greatest gift we can receive; surely it deserves a special thanksgiving. This is the purpose of the devotion to the Eucharistic heart.

If an author who offers you a good book is rightly offended when he receives no expression of thanks from you, much more painful is the ingratitude of one who fails to return thanks after Communion, by which Christ gives Himself to us.

Have the faithful who leave the church almost immediately after receiving Holy Communion forgotten that the Real Presence subsists in them as sacramental species for about a quarter of an hour after Communion, and can they not keep their divine Guest company for this short time?¹⁰⁸⁰ Christ calls us, He gives Himself to us with infinite love, and yet we have nothing to say to Him and are not willing to listen to Him for a few moments.

Bossuet used to recall that the saints, in particular St. Teresa, have often told us that sacramental thanksgiving is the most

precious moment in our spiritual life.¹⁰⁸¹ The essence of the Sacrifice of the Mass is indeed in the double consecration, but it is by Communion that we ourselves share in this sacrifice of infinite value. As a result of our Communion, contact is established between the holy soul of Jesus, personally united to the Word, and our soul, an intimate union of His human intellect, illumined by the light of glory, with our intellect, which is often darkened, clouded, forgetful of our great duties, in some measure obtuse in regard to divine things. A no less profound union of the human will of Christ, immutably fixed in the good, is also established with our wavering, inconstant will; and finally, a union of His most pure sensibility with ours, which at times is so troubled. In Christ's sensibility are the two virtues of fortitude and virginity, which strengthen and render virginal the souls that draw near to Him.

But Christ speaks only to those who listen to Him, only to those who are not voluntarily distracted. We should not only reproach ourselves for our directly voluntary distractions, but also for those which are indirectly so, as a result of our negligence in not considering what we ought to consider, in not willing what we ought to will, in not doing what we ought to do. This negligence is the source of a multitude of sins of omission, which pass almost unseen in our examination of conscience, because they are not something positive, but rather the absence of what should be. Many persons who find no sin in themselves, because they have committed no grievous sins, are full of sins of omission, sins of indirectly voluntary and consequently culpable negligence.

Let us not neglect the duty of thanksgiving, as is so often done today. What fruits can be derived from Communions received with so little respect?

Unfortunately in some countries many priests themselves make, so to speak, no thanksgiving after their Mass. Others confound their thanksgiving with the obligatory and more or less recollected recitation of a part of the Office, with the result that they no longer have enough personal piety to vivify from within the official piety, as it were, of the minister of God. The results are sad indeed. How can the priest who no longer sufficiently nourishes the life of his own soul with the divine life, give it to others? How can he relieve the profound spiritual needs of souls that are famished, and who, after having recourse to him, sometimes go away sadder than ever, asking themselves anxiously where they can find what they require? Souls that hunger and thirst for God, souls that have received much and that, in the midst of great difficulties, should give abundantly to those about them in order to assist souls that are dying spiritually, are sometimes told: "Do not take so much trouble. You do more than is necessary." We may well wonder what is to become of zeal, of the ardor of Charity, and how Christ's words are to be verified: "I am come to cast fire on the earth: and what will I, but that it be kindled?" "I am come that they may have life, and may have it more abundantly."

A truly pious person who used to reproach himself for not thinking sufficiently during the day of Holy Communion which he had received that morning, once received this reply to his expressed concern: "We do not think of the meal that we had some hours ago." That was the reply of practical naturalism, which lost sight of the immense distance separating the Eucharistic bread from ordinary bread. The state of mind evinced by such a statement is manifestly the direct opposite of the contemplation of the mystery of the Eucharist: it springs from the habitual negligence with which one receives God's most precious gifts. In the long run, a person no longer sees their value, which he knows only in a theoretical manner, and the counsels that he gives in no way lead souls to intimate union with God; they do not go beyond the level of casuistry, which is concerned only with knowing what is obligatory in order to avoid sin.

This state of soul can lead far; one can thus forget that every Christian, each according to his condition, must tend to the perfection of charity in virtue of the supreme precept: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart and with thy whole soul and with all thy strength and with all thy mind."¹⁰⁸²

Were they to follow this path, the priest and religious would also forget that they have not only a general, but a special obligation to tend to perfection in order that they may daily perform their sacred functions with greater holiness and be more closely united to our Lord.

In certain periods of the history of monastic orders, some religious, after celebrating their private Mass, did not go to the conventual Mass even on feast days, unless it was canonically indisputable that they were obliged to do so. If they had made their thanksgiving in a proper manner, would they have reached the point of judging in this fashion? Casuistry tended to prevail over spirituality, which was considered a secondary matter. That day on which we consider intimate union with God as something secondary, we no longer tend to perfection; we lose sight of the meaning and the import of the supreme precept: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart, and with thy whole soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind." Our judgment is then no longer the judgment of wisdom; it no longer proceeds in any way from the gift of wisdom; we have begun to descend the slope of spiritual folly. This is the goal progressively reached through negligence in making a proper thanksgiving.¹⁰⁸³

Remissness in regard to thanksgiving becomes negligence in adoration, which would end by being only exterior, negligence also in supplication and in reparation. We would thus more and more lose sight of the four ends of the sacrifice in order to give ourselves often to secondary matters which, moreover, lose their true moral and spiritual value as soon as they are no longer

vivified by union with God.

Every benefit calls for an expression of gratitude; a measureless benefit demands a proportionate acknowledgment. Since we are not capable of offering God gratitude proportionate to His gift, we should ask Mary Mediatrix to come to our help and to obtain for us a share in the thanksgiving she offered to God after the sacrifice of the cross, after the *Consummatum est*, a share in the thanksgiving she made after St. John's Mass, which truly continued in substance on the altar the sacrifice of Calvary. Negligence so frequent in thanksgiving after Communion springs from our insufficient knowledge of the gift of God: "If thou didst know the gift of God!" Let us ask our Lord humbly but ardently for the grace of a great spirit of faith, which will permit us daily to realize the value of the Eucharist a little better. Let us ask for the grace of the supernatural contemplation of this mystery of faith, that is, the experimental knowledge which proceeds from the gifts of understanding and wisdom, and which is the cause of a fervent thanksgiving in the measure in which we are more conscious of the greatness of the gift received.

The Prayer of Petition

We have spoken of the purification of the soul by the sacraments, by sacramental confession, assistance at Mass, and frequent Communion. We shall now discuss the purification of the soul in beginners through prayer. First of all, we shall speak of the efficacy of the prayer of petition in general, then of liturgical prayer, which is the psalmody, and of the spirit which ought to animate it, finally of the mental prayer of beginners. We shall begin with the most general principles.

THE NECESSITY OF A STRONG BELIEF IN THE EFFICACY OF PRAYER

The question of the efficacy of prayer interests all souls without distinction: those who are beginning, those who have made progress, and even those in the state of mortal sin, for though the sinner who has lost sanctifying grace cannot merit, he can always pray.

Merit, being a right to a reward, is related to divine justice;¹⁰⁸⁴ prayer, on the other hand, is addressed to divine mercy, which often hears and grants it and lifts up the soul without any merit on its part; thus it raises up souls that have fallen into the state of spiritual death. The most wretched man, from the depths of the abyss into which he has fallen, can utter this cry to mercy, which is prayer. The beggar who possesses nothing but his poverty can pray in the very name of his wretchedness, and, if he puts his whole heart into his petition, mercy inclines toward him; the abyss of wretchedness calls to that of mercy. The soul is raised up, and God is glorified. We should recall the conversion of Magdalen; let us also remember the prayer of Daniel for Israel: "Thou hast executed true judgments in all the things that Thou hast brought upon us... for we have sinned and committed iniquity.... Deliver us not up forever, we beseech Thee, for Thy name's sake."¹⁰⁸⁵ The psalms are filled with these petitions: "But I am needy and poor; O God, help me. Thou art my helper and my deliverer: O Lord, make no delay."¹⁰⁸⁶ "Help us, O God, our Savior; and for the glory of Thy name, O Lord, deliver us: and forgive us our sins for Thy name's sake."¹⁰⁸⁷ "Thou art my helper and my protector: and in Thy word I have greatly hoped.... Uphold me according to Thy word, and I shall live: and let me not be confounded in my expectation."¹⁰⁸⁸

Do we believe in the power of prayer? When temptation threatens to make us fall, when light does not shine in us, when the cross is hard to carry, do we have recourse to prayer, as Christ advised us to? Do we not doubt its efficacy, if not in principle at least in practice? Yet we know Christ's promise: "Ask, and it shall be given you."¹⁰⁸⁹ We know the common teaching of theologians: that true prayer, by which we ask for ourselves with humility, confidence, and perseverance the graces necessary for our salvation, is infallibly efficacious.¹⁰⁹⁰ We know this doctrine, and yet it seems to us at times that we have truly prayed without being heard.

We believe in, or rather we see, the power of a machine, of an army, of money, and of knowledge; but we do not believe strongly enough in the efficacy of prayer. The power of that intellectual force which is knowledge, we see by its results; there is nothing very mysterious about it, for we know whence this power comes and approximately whither it goes. It is acquired by human means and produces effects that remain within human limits. If, on the contrary, prayer is in question, we believe too weakly in it, because we do not know clearly whence it comes and we forget whither it is going.

Let us recall the source of the efficacy of prayer and the end to which it is ordained, what it ought to obtain; in other words, its first principle and its end.

THE SOURCE OF THE EFFICACY OF PRAYER

The sources of rivers are high up; the waters of the heavens and the fountain of the snows feed their streams. A river is first a torrent which descends from the mountains before irrigating the valley and casting itself into the sea. This is a figure of the loftiness of the source of the efficacy of prayer.

At times we seem to believe that prayer is a force which should have its first principle in ourselves, one by which we would try to bend the will of God by persuasion. Immediately our thought encounters the following difficulty, often formulated by unbelievers, in particular by the deists of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries: namely, no one can move, no one can bend the will of God. God is indeed Goodness which asks only to give itself, Mercy ever ready to come to the help of him who suffers. But God is also perfectly immutable Being. The divine will is from all eternity as immovable as it is merciful. No one can boast of having enlightened God, of having made Him change His will: "I am the Lord, and I change not."¹⁰⁹¹ By the decrees of Providence, the order of things and of events is strongly and gently established from all eternity.¹⁰⁹² Must we conclude from

this, with fatalism, that prayer can do nothing, that it is too late, that whether we pray or not, what is to happen will happen?

The words of Holy Scripture remain, and the interior life must ever penetrate them more deeply: "Ask, and it shall be given you: seek, and you shall find: knock, and it shall be opened to you."¹⁰⁹³

Prayer is not, in fact, a force having its first principle in us; it is not an effort of the human soul, trying to do violence to God in order to make Him change His providential dispositions. Such a manner of speaking, which is used occasionally, is a metaphorical, human way of expressing oneself. In reality, the will of God is absolutely immutable, but this superior immutability is precisely the source of the infallible efficacy of prayer.

Fundamentally it is very simple in spite of the mystery of grace involved in it. We have here a combination of the clear and the obscure that is most captivating and beautiful. First of all, we shall consider what is clear: true prayer is infallibly efficacious because God, who cannot contradict Himself, has decreed that it should be.¹⁰⁹⁴ This is what the contemplation of the saints examines profoundly.

A God who would not have willed and foreseen from all eternity the prayers that we address to Him, is a conception as puerile as that of a God who would change His plans, bowing before our will.

Not only all that happens has been foreseen and willed (or at least permitted) in advance by a providential decree, but the way things happen, the causes which produce events; all is fixed from all eternity by Providence. For material harvests, God prepared the seed, the rain that must help it to germinate, the sun that will ripen the fruits of the earth. Likewise for spiritual harvests, He has prepared spiritual seeds, the divine graces necessary for sanctification and salvation. In all orders, from the lowest to the highest, in view of certain effects God prepares the causes that must produce them.

Prayer is precisely a cause ordained to produce this effect: the obtaining of the gifts of God. All creatures exist only by the gifts of God, but the intellectual creature alone can realize this. Existence, health, physical strength, the light of the intellect, moral energy, success in our enterprises, all is the gift of God; but especially is this true of grace which leads to salutary good, causes it to be accomplished, and gives strength to persevere. Grace and, even more, the Holy Ghost who has been sent to us and who is the source of living water, is the gift par excellence which Christ spoke of to the Samaritan woman: "If thou didst know the gift of God, and who He is that saith to thee: Give Me to drink; thou perhaps wouldst have asked of Him, and He would have given thee living water.... Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again; but he that shall drink of the water that I will give him shall not thirst forever. But the water that I will give him shall become in him a fountain of water, springing up into life everlasting."¹⁰⁹⁵

The intellectual creature alone is able to realize that it can live naturally and supernaturally only by the gift of God. Must we, then, be astonished that divine Providence has willed that man should ask for alms, since he can understand that he lives only on alms?

Here, as elsewhere, God wills first of all the final effect; then He ordains the means or the causes which must produce it. After having decided to give, He decides that we shall pray in order to receive, as a father, who has resolved in advance to bestow a pleasure on his children, purposes to make them ask for it. The gift of God is a result; prayer is the cause ordained to obtain it. St. Gregory the Great says: "Men ought by prayer to dispose themselves to receive what Almighty God from eternity has decided to give them."¹⁰⁹⁶ Thus Christ, wishing to convert the Samaritan woman, led her to pray by saying to her: "If thou didst know the gift of God!" In the same way, He granted Magdalen a strong and gentle actual grace which inclined her to repentance and to prayer. He acted in the same manner toward Zacheus and the good thief. It is, therefore, as necessary to pray in order to obtain the help of God, which we need to do good and to persevere in it, as it is necessary to sow seed in order to have wheat. To those who say that what was to happen would happen, whether they prayed or not, the answer must be made that such a statement is as foolish as to maintain that whether we sowed seed or not, once the summer came, we would have wheat. Providence affects not only the results, but the means to be employed, and in addition it differs from fatalism in that it safeguards human liberty by a grace as gentle as it is efficacious, *fortiter et suaviter*. Without a doubt, an actual grace is necessary in order to pray; but this grace is offered to all, and only those who refuse it are deprived of it.¹⁰⁹⁷

Therefore prayer is necessary to obtain the help of God, as seed is necessary for the harvest. Even more, though the best seed, for lack of favorable exterior conditions, can produce nothing, though thousands of seeds are lost, true, humble, trusting prayer, by which we ask for ourselves what is necessary for salvation, is never lost. It is heard in this sense, that it obtains for us the grace to continue praying.

The efficacy of prayer well made is infallibly assured by Christ: "Ask, and it shall be given you: seek and you shall find: knock, and it shall be opened to you.... And which of you, if he ask his father bread, will he give him a stone? Or a fish, will he for a fish give him a serpent?... If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father from heaven give the good Spirit to them that ask Him?"¹⁰⁹⁸ To the apostles He also says: "Amen, amen I say to you: if you ask the Father anything in My name, He will give it to you. Hitherto you have not asked anything in My name."¹⁰⁹⁹ Prayerful souls ought more than all others to live by this doctrine, which is elementary for every Christian; by living it, one discovers its depths.

Let us, therefore, have confidence in the efficacy of prayer. It is not only a human force which has its first principle in us; the source of its efficacy is in God and in the infinite merits of Christ. It descends from an eternal decree of love, it reascends to divine mercy. A fountain of water rises only if the water descends from an equal height. Likewise when we pray, it is not a question of persuading God, of inclining Him to change His providential dispositions; rather we have only to lift our will to the height of His in order to will with Him in time what He has decided from all eternity to grant us. Far from tending to bring the Most High down toward us, “prayer is a lifting up of the soul toward God,” as the fathers say. When we pray and are heard, it seems to us that the will of God inclines toward us; on the contrary, it is ours which rises; we begin to will in time what God willed for us from all eternity.

Hence, far from being opposed to the divine governance, prayer cooperates in it. We are two who will instead of one. And when, for example, we have prayed much in order to obtain a conversion and have been heard, we can say that it is certainly God who converted this soul, but who deigned to associate us with Him and from all eternity had decided to make us pray that this great grace might be obtained.

Thus we cooperate in our salvation by asking for ourselves the graces necessary to attain it; among these graces, some, such as that of final perseverance, cannot be merited,¹¹⁰⁰ but are obtained by humble, trusting, and persevering prayer. Likewise, efficacious grace, which preserves us from mortal sin and keeps us in the state of grace, is not merited; otherwise we would merit the very principle of merit (the continued state of grace); but it can be obtained by prayer. Moreover, the actual and efficacious grace of loving contemplation, although, properly speaking, not merited *de condigno*, is obtained by prayer: “Wherefore I wished, and understanding was given me: and I called upon God, and the spirit of wisdom came upon me.”¹¹⁰¹

Even when we are trying to obtain the grace of conversion for another, who perhaps resists it, the greater the number of persons who pray and the more each one perseveres in prayer, the more hope there is of obtaining this grace of conversion. Prayer thus greatly cooperates in the divine governance.

THE PARTICULAR PETITIONS WE SHOULD MAKE

We have just seen the nature of the first principle of the efficacy of prayer. We shall now consider the end to which it is ordained by God, what it can obtain for us.

The end to which Providence has ordained prayer as a means, is the obtaining of the gifts of God necessary to sanctification and salvation; for prayer is a cause which has its place in the life of souls, as heat and electricity have their place in the physical order. Now the end of the life of the soul is eternal life, and the goods which direct us to it are of two kinds: spiritual goods, which lead us to it directly; and temporal goods, which can be indirectly useful to salvation in the measure in which they are subordinated to the first.

Spiritual goods are habitual and actual grace, the virtues, the seven gifts of the Holy Ghost, and merits, the fruits of the virtues and of the gifts. According to what we have just said, humble, trusting, persevering prayer is all-powerful to obtain for the sinner the grace of conversion and for the just man actual grace that he may persevere in the performance of his duties. Prayer, made under the same conditions, is all-powerful to obtain for us also a more lively faith, a firmer hope, a more ardent charity, a greater fidelity to our vocation. The first petition we should make, as the Our Father points out, is that the name of God may be sanctified, glorified by a radiating faith; that His kingdom may come is the object of hope; that His will may be done, fulfilled with love, by an ever purer and stronger charity.

Moreover, prayer can obtain our daily bread for us in the measure in which it is necessary or useful for salvation, the supersubstantial bread of the Eucharist and the suitable dispositions to receive it well. Besides, prayer obtains for us the pardon of our sins and disposes us to pardon our neighbor; it preserves us from temptation or gives us the strength to triumph over it.

To accomplish all this, prayer must have the indicated conditions: it must be sincere, humble (it is a poor man who is asking), trusting in the infinite goodness, which it must not doubt, persevering, in order to be the expression of a profound desire of our hearts. Such was the prayer of the woman of Canaan, whom the Gospel mentions and to whom Christ said: “O woman, great is thy faith. Be it done to thee as thou wilt.”¹¹⁰²

Even if the Lord leaves us contending with great difficulties from which we have prayed Him to deliver us, we must not believe that we are not heard. The simple fact that we continue to pray shows that God is helping us, for without a new actual grace we would not continue to pray. He leaves us to battle with these difficulties in order to inure us to warfare. He wishes to show us that the struggle is profitable for us and that, as He said to St. Paul in similar circumstances, the grace granted us suffices to continue a struggle in which the very strength of the Lord, which is the source of ours, is more clearly shown: “My grace is sufficient for thee: for power is made perfect in infirmity.”¹¹⁰³ We see this especially in the passive purifications of the senses and the spirit, which are at times a spiritual tempest, in which we must continually ask for efficacious grace, which alone can prevent us from weakening.

In regard to temporal goods, prayer can obtain for us all those which should, in one way or another, assist us in our journey toward eternity: our daily bread, health, strength, the success of our enterprises. Prayer can obtain everything, on condition that over and above all else we ask God for greater love of Him: “Seek ye therefore first the kingdom of God and His justice, and all these things shall be added unto you.”^{[1104](#)} If we do not obtain these temporal goods, it is because they are not useful to our salvation; if our prayer is well made, we obtain a more precious grace in place of them.

“The Lord is nigh unto all them that call upon Him.”^{[1105](#)} And the prayer of petition, if it is truly a lifting up of the soul to God, prepares the soul for a more intimate prayer of adoration, reparation, and thanksgiving, and for the prayer of union.

Liturgical Prayer

One of the greatest means of union with God for the religious soul is the psalmody, which in religious orders is the daily accompaniment of the Mass. The Mass is the great prayer of Christ; it will continue until the end of the world, as long as He does not cease to offer Himself by the ministry of His priests; as long as from His sacerdotal and Eucharistic heart there rises always the theandric act of love and oblation, which has infinite value as adoration, reparation, petition, and thanksgiving. The psalmody of the Divine Office is the great prayer of the Church, the spouse of Christ; a day and night prayer, which ought never to cease on the surface of the earth, as the Mass does not.

For those who have the great honor to take part in the chant, the psalmody should be an admirable school of contemplation, of self oblation, of holiness. That it may produce these abundant fruits, the psalmody should keep what is its very essence; it ought to have not only a body which is well organized according to harmonious rules, but also a soul. If it ceases to be the great contemplative prayer, it gradually loses its soul and, instead of being a soaring, a rising toward God, and a repose, it becomes a burden, a source of fatigue, and no longer produces great fruits. Therefore we shall discuss briefly first of all deformed and materialized chant, then true psalmody, which is a deliverance, like the chant of the Church, above all the noises of earth.

DEFORMED PSALMODY

Deformed psalmody is a body without a soul. Generally, it is marked by unseemly haste, as if undue haste, which, according to St. Francis de Sales, is the death of devotion, could replace true and profound life. The words of the Office are badly pronounced without rhythm or measure. The antiphons, which are often beautiful, are poorly said and become unintelligible, the hymns even more so. The lessons which are not punctuated as they should be, are read as one would read the most indifferent or even the most boring passages, when, as a matter of fact, they are concerned with the splendors of divine wisdom or what is most beautiful in the lives of the saints. People wish to save time, four or five minutes which they will devote to worthless trifles, and they lose the best of the time given by God. Father de Condren used to say: "If a master spoke to his servant as a number of people speak to God while saying the Divine Office, the servant would think that his master was insane to be jabbering in such fashion."

As a result of haste, the psalmody of which we are speaking is mechanical and not organic; just as in a body without a soul, the members are no longer vitally united, but only placed together. The Office becomes a series of words following one another. The great meaning of a psalm is no longer comprehended; to one who is trying to grasp this meaning and to follow it, this mechanical chant brings fatigue and is an obstacle to true prayer.

Is this manner of chanting a lifting of the soul toward God? Perhaps, but it is a uniformly retarded elevation, like the movement of a stone that has been thrown into the air and tends to fall back; whereas true prayer ought, like a flame, to tend spontaneously toward heaven.

What remedies can be applied to this evil? The remedy is to be found in recalling the rules for the chant. But this remedy is not effective if it alone is applied. The evil is deeper, and we must go to its roots. In reality, there is only one truly effective remedy that makes possible the utilization of the others: namely, the restoration of the spirit of prayer. Similarly, in order to restore functions to a body without a soul, life would have to be restored to it.

Deformed psalmody shows us that, for a soul which has no personal life of prayer, the recitation of the Office becomes altogether material, a wholly exterior worship. Not possessing the habit of recollection, this soul is assailed by thoughts foreign to the Office; its work, studies, or business affairs keep returning to its memory, and at times even thoroughly vain thoughts come. The most interior persons sometimes experience this distress. But in the case of those we are speaking of, it is a habitual state of negligence, and in them distraction does not remain in the imagination; it invades the higher faculties. How can anyone in this state taste the divine words of the psalms, the prophets, the Epistles, the most beautiful pages of the fathers and of the lives of the saints which are daily offered to us in the Divine Office? All these spiritual beauties remain unperceived like colorless and insipid objects. The great poetry of the Psalmist and the most profound cries of his heart become spiritless and monotonous. One day in choir, St. Bernard saw above each religious his guardian angel who was writing down the chant. The manner of writing differed greatly, however: some wrote in letters of gold, others in silver, while still others wrote with ink or with colorless water; one angel held his pen poised and wrote nothing. Routine mummifies the most profoundly living passages and reduces them to mechanically recited formulas. This manner of chanting is nothing but practical nominalism, a sort of materialism in action. The higher faculties do not live in a prayer made thus; they remain somnolent or scattered. A person may

still hear the symphony of the Office, more beautiful than the most famous symphonies of Beethoven, but for lack of an interior feeling, he can no longer appreciate it. Often the Divine Office is studied from the historical point of view, or from the canonical point of view of strict obligations, and these distinctions are held to; but it is especially from the spiritual point of view that it must be considered and lived.

CONTEMPLATIVE CHANT

What should the contemplative chant be? This chant is distinguished precisely by the spirit of prayer, or at least by the aspiration which inclines us to it, which desires it, seeks it, and at length obtains it. We are thus shown how much the contemplation of the mysteries of faith is in the normal way of sanctity: this contemplation alone can give us in liturgical prayer the light, peace, and joy of the truth tasted and loved, *gaudium de veritate*.

The spirit of prayer, more intimately drawn from mental prayer, is lost as soon as one hurries to finish daily prayer, as if it were not the very respiration of the soul, spiritual contact with God, our Life. It was in the spirit of prayer that the psalms were conceived without it, we cannot understand them or live by them. "As the hart panteth after the fountains of water, so my soul panteth after Thee, O God."¹¹⁰⁶

If the psalmody has this spirit, then in place of mechanical haste, which is a superficial life, we find profound life for which we do not need continually to recall liturgical rules, for these rules are merely the expression of its inner inclinations. Then, without excessive slowness the words are well pronounced, undue haste is avoided, and the pauses, serving as a vital rest between aspiration and respiration, are observed. The antiphons are tasted, and the soul is truly nourished with the substance of the liturgical text. Whoever has the duty of reading the lessons, which are often most beautiful, should look them over ahead of time in order not to spoil their meaning. He who reads the lessons well avoids a too evident expression of his personal piety, but the great objective meaning of Scripture explained by the fathers remains intelligible, and here and there he grasps its splendors in the midst of its divine obscurities. No effort is made to save four or five minutes, and he ceases to lose the precious time given by God. He is even led at the end of the chant to prolong prayer by some moments of mental prayer, like the religious in bygone days who, at night after Matins and Lauds, spent some time in profound recollection. Many times in the history of their lives mention is made of these secret prayers, of this heart to heart conversation with God in which they often received the greatest lights, which made them glimpse what they had sought till then during hours and hours of labor. When this spirit of prayer prevails, real life begins, and one understands that mental prayer gives the spirit of the chant; whereas the psalmody furnishes to mental prayer the best possible food, the very word of God, distributed and explained in a suitable manner, according to the cycle of the liturgical year, according to the true time, which coincides with the single instant of immobile eternity.¹¹⁰⁷

Such prayer is no longer mechanical, but organic; the soul has returned to vivify the body; prayer is no longer a succession of words; we are able to seize the vital spirit running through them. Without effort, even in the most painful hours of life, we can taste the admirable poetry of the psalms and find in them light, rest, strength, renewal of all energies. Then truly this prayer is a lifting up of the soul toward God, a lifting up that is not uniformly retarded, but rather accelerated. The soul burns therein and is consumed in a holy manner like the candles on the altar.

St. Thomas Aquinas deeply loved this beautiful chant thus understood. It is told of him that he could not keep back his tears when, during Compline of Lent, he chanted the antiphon: "In the midst of life we are in death: whom do we seek as our helper, but Thou, O Lord, who because of our sins art rightly incensed? Holy God, strong God, holy and merciful Savior, deliver us not up to a bitter death; abandon us not in the time of our old age, when our strength will abandon us." This beautiful antiphon begs for the grace of final perseverance, the grace of graces, that of the predestined. How it should speak to the heart of the contemplative theologian, who has made a deep study of the tracts on Providence, predestination, and grace!

The chant, which prepares so admirably for Mass and which follows it, is one of the greatest means by which the theologian, as well as others, may rise far above reasoning to contemplation, to the simple gaze on God and to divine union. The theologian who has spent a long time over his books in a positive and speculative study of revelation, in the refutation of numerous errors and the examination of many opinions relating to the great mysteries of the Trinity, the Incarnation, the Eucharist, the life of heaven, needs, after such study, to rise above all this bookish knowledge; he needs profound recollection, truly divine light, which is superior to reasoning and gives him the spirit of the letter which he has studied. Otherwise he grows spiritually anaemic and, because of insufficient contact with the light of life, he cannot give it adequately to others. His work remains too mechanical, not sufficiently organized and living, or it may be that the governing idea of his synthesis has not been drawn from a high enough source; it lacks amplitude, life, radiation, and little by little it loses its interest. The theologian needs often to find the living and splendid expression of the mysteries that he studies in the very words of God, such as the liturgy makes us taste and love: "Taste, and see that the Lord is sweet."¹¹⁰⁸

The word of God, which is thus daily recalled to us in prayer, is to its theological commentary what a simple circumference

is to the polygon inscribed in it. We must forget the polygon momentarily in order to enjoy a little and in a holy manner the beauty of the circle, which the movement of contemplation follows, as Dionysius used to say. This is found during the chant, if mechanical haste is not substituted for the profound life which ought to spring from the fountain. The body of the chant must be truly vivified by the spirit of prayer.

There is great happiness in hearing the Divine Office thus chanted in many monasteries of Benedictines, Carthusians, Carmelites, Dominicans, and Franciscans. This prayer attracts good vocations, whereas the other, because it is materialized, drives them away. When we hear the great contemplative prayer in certain cloisters, we feel the current of the true life of the Church; it is its chant, both simple and splendid, which precedes and follows the sublime words of the Spouse: the Eucharistic consecration. We are made to forget all the sorrows of this world, all the more or less false complications and all the tiresome tasks imposed by human conventions. God grant that the chant may ever remain thus keenly alive day and night in our monasteries! It has been noticed that when it ceases at night in those convents where it should go on, the Lord raises up nocturnal adoration to replace it, for living prayer ought not to cease, and prayer during the night, by reason of the profound silence into which everything is plunged and for many other reasons, has special graces of contemplation: *Oportet semper orare*.

The chant thus understood is the holy repose which souls need after all the fatigues, agitations, and complications of the world. It is rest in God, rest that is full of life, rest which from afar resembles that of God, who possesses His interminable life *tota simul*, in the single instant which never passes, and which at the same time measures supreme action and supreme rest, *quies in bono amato*.

We may define the mutual relations of mental prayer and the Divine Office by saying that from mental prayer the Office receives the habit of recollection and the spirit of prayer. On the other hand, mental prayer finds in liturgical prayer an abundant source of contemplation and an objective rule against individual illusions. The Divine Office cures sentimentality by continually recalling the great truths in the very language of Scripture; it reminds presumptuous souls of the greatness and severity of divine justice, and it also reminds fearful souls of infinite mercy and the value of the passion of Christ. It makes sentimental souls live on the heights of true faith and charity, far above sensibility.

It will suffice here to recall one example among many: the tract from the Mass for Quadragesima Sunday taken from psalm 90: "He that dwelleth in the aid of the most High, shall abide under the protection of the God of Jacob. He shall say to the Lord: Thou art my protector and my refuge: my God, in Him will I trust. For He hath delivered me from the snare of the hunters and from the sharp word. He will overshadow thee with His shoulders: and under His wings thou shalt trust. His truth shall compass thee with a shield: thou shalt not be afraid of the terror of the night, of the arrow that flieth in the day... or of the noonday devil. A thousand shall fall at thy side, and ten thousand at thy right hand: but it shall not come nigh thee.... For He hath given His angels charge over thee to keep thee in all thy ways. In their hands they shall bear thee up lest thou dash thy foot against a stone.... He shall cry to Me, and I will hear him: I am with him in tribulation, I will deliver him and I will glorify him. I will fill him with length of days; and I will show him My salvation."

The liturgy recalls all the ages of the spiritual life by the joyful mysteries of the childhood of the Savior, by His passion, and by the glorious mysteries; it thus gives true spiritual joy which enlarges the heart: "I have run the way of Thy commandments, when Thou didst enlarge my heart."¹¹⁰⁹ It prepares the soul for the more intimate and silent prayer of meditation.

The Mental Prayer of Beginners

Its Progressive Simplification

“Pray to thy Father in secret: and thy Father who seeth in secret will repay thee.” Matt. 6:6

In our discussion of the efficacy of prayer in general and of the Divine Office, we saw that prayer is a lifting up of the soul to God, by which we will in time what God wills from all eternity that we should ask of Him: namely, the various means of salvation, particularly progress in charity: “Seek ye therefore first the kingdom of God and His justice, and all these things shall be added unto you.”¹¹¹⁰ The prayer of petition should be accompanied by adoration, reparation, and thanksgiving. These are the sentiments we should have when we say the Divine Office. But we feel the need of a more intimate prayer, in which our soul, more profoundly recollected, comes into contact with the Blessed Trinity dwelling in us, a contact which is necessary that we may receive from the interior Master that light of life which alone can make us penetrate deeply and taste the mysteries of salvation: those of the redeeming Incarnation, of the Sacrifice of the Mass, of eternal life toward which we are traveling. This light of life is also necessary to reform our character by spiritualizing and supernaturalizing it, by rendering it more conformable to Him who invites us to seek peace of soul in humility and meekness. This more intimate prayer is mental prayer.

We shall see, first of all, what the mental prayer of beginners should be. In the following chapter we will explain how to attain to a life of prayer and persevere in it.

THE NATURE OF MENTAL PRAYER; OUR ATTITUDE TOWARD METHODS

In the Gospel, Christ tells us: “And when ye pray, ye shall not be as the hypocrites, that love to stand and pray in the synagogues and corners of the streets, that they may be seen by men.... But thou, when thou shalt pray, enter into thy chamber and, having shut the door, pray to thy Father in secret: and thy Father who seeth in secret will repay thee.”¹¹¹¹

In a statement that is both simple and profound, St. Teresa says: “Mental prayer is nothing else, in my opinion, but being on terms of friendship with God, frequently conversing in secret with Him who, as we know, loves us.”¹¹¹² Genuinely simple and pure Christian souls have always been acquainted with this completely spontaneous and intimate prayer. A peasant who was questioned by the Cure of Ars on his manner of prayer, defined it admirably by saying: “I look at our Lord who is in the tabernacle, and He looks at me.” This is indeed the commerce of friendship, by which the soul converses alone with God by whom it believes itself loved. This interior prayer, which was so often that of the first Christians in the catacombs, has always existed in profoundly humble and religious souls eager for God. The royal Psalmist was, most certainly, profoundly acquainted with this prayer when he wrote: “As the hart panteth after the fountains of water, so my soul panteth after Thee, O God. My soul hath thirsted after the strong living God. When shall I come and appear before the face of God?”¹¹¹³

What is simpler than prayer? Its spontaneity is, however, taken away at times by the use of excessively complicated methods, which draw too much attention to themselves and not enough to God, whom the soul should seek. A method is good as a way of finding the truth, on condition that it can be forgotten and that it lead truly to the end toward which one tends. To prefer the method to the truth, or a certain intellectual mechanism to reality that should be known, would be a manifest aberration, similar to that of the meticulous man or of the pedant. Moreover, an over-complicated method provokes a reaction, and even an excessive reaction in some who, worn out by this complexity, often end up in a vague reverie that has scarcely any true piety about it except the name.

The truth, here as elsewhere, is to be found in the middle and above these two extreme, opposite deviations. A method, or to speak more simply with Bossuet, a manner of making prayer, is useful, especially at the beginning, to preserve us from mental rambling. But that it may not by its complexity become an obstacle rather than a help, it must be simple, and, far from breaking the spontaneity and continuity of prayer, it should be content with describing the ascending movement of the soul toward God. It should be limited to indicating the essential acts of which this movement is composed. We should remember especially that prayer depends principally on the grace of God, and that a person prepares for it far less by processes that would remain mechanical, so to speak, than by humility; “God... giveth grace to the humble.”¹¹¹⁴

THE ESSENTIAL ACTS OF PRAYER

What are the essential acts of prayer? First of all, prayer is not only an act of the intellect, like a simple study or reading. There are speculative souls who are curious about the things of God, but they are not for that reason contemplative souls, souls of prayer. If in their considerations they taste a pleasure which far exceeds that of the senses, this pleasure comes perhaps more from their knowledge than from their charity; they are moved more by the love of knowledge, it may be, than by the love of God. St. Thomas, who distinguishes between these two loves, says that in prayer it is the second which should lead the intellect to the knowledge of God, with the purpose of loving Him more.¹¹¹⁵ In this statement is a holy realism, that which is observed in the knowledge of the servants of God.

The pleasure which is born, not of the love of God but of the love of knowledge, often increases pride and makes souls love themselves more; they seek themselves without being aware of it. Study and speculation, even when they do not err, do not necessarily presuppose the state of grace and charity, and do not always cooperate in increasing it.

Prayer, on the contrary, should proceed from the love of God and should end in Him. Through love of God, one seeks to contemplate Him, and the contemplation of His goodness and His beauty increases love. We read in *The Dialogue of St. Catherine of Siena*: “Knowledge must precede love, and only when she has attained love, can she strive to follow and to clothe herself with the truth.”¹¹¹⁶ In the same work, we read: “With this (supernatural) light the souls in the unitive state love Me, because love follows the intellect, and the more it knows the more it can love. Thus the one feeds the other.”¹¹¹⁷

Moreover, as St. Thomas says,¹¹¹⁸ here on earth the love of God is more perfect than the knowledge of God; charity is more perfect than faith. Why is this? Because knowledge, as it were, draws God down to us and imposes on Him the bounds of our limited ideas, whereas love draws us toward God, lifts us up toward Him, unites us to Him.¹¹¹⁹ Besides, as long as we are deprived of the beatific vision, it is chiefly by charity that union with God is made; this is why perfection consists especially in charity, which ought to have the uncontested first place in our soul.¹¹²⁰ This is equivalent to saying that in prayer the soul should rise toward God on the two wings of the intellect and the will, aided by the influence of grace. Prayer is, therefore, a wholly supernatural movement of knowledge and love.

Hence we can readily enumerate the essential acts of prayer. To be this lifting up of the whole soul toward God, prayer must be prepared for by an act of humility and proceed from the three theological virtues, which unite us to God, animate the virtue of religion, and obtain for us the lights and inspirations of the Holy Ghost. The generous soul flies, so to speak, like a bird by the effort of its wings, but the breath of the Holy Ghost sustains this effort and rather often bears the soul farther aloft than it could go by its own virtues. Not in vain are the seven gifts of the Holy Ghost found in all the just without exception.¹¹²¹

We shall consider these various acts of prayer. In the perfect, they are often simultaneous and continuous; but to describe them, we must enumerate them one after the other, as they present themselves in beginners.

Normally we should begin our prayer with an act of humility, for it is fitting that, when about to converse with God, we should recall what we are. Let us think of our Lord’s words to St. Catherine of Siena: “I am who am, thou art she who is not.” Of ourselves we are nothing, and even less than nothing, because our sins are a disorder inferior to nothingness itself. This act of humility is normally accompanied by an act of repentance and an act of adoration, like that which prompts the genuflection made on entering a church. These acts remove pride, the chief obstacle to grace, and this true humility, far from depressing us, reminds us that in a fragile vessel we bear a precious treasure, sanctifying grace and the Blessed Trinity dwelling in us. Thus begun, prayer does not proceed from vain sentimentality, but from the life of grace, which is immensely superior to our sensibility.

After this act of humility, we should make a profound and prolonged act of faith in some fundamental truth or other: God, His perfections, His goodness, or Christ, the mysteries of His life, His passion, His glory, or again our great duties, our vocation, our last end, sin, the duties of our state to be accomplished with ever greater holiness. These subjects should recur. On feast days the liturgy itself gives us the subject. If the feast commemorates a mystery in the life of Christ, such as that of His passion, we should consider it first of all under its sensible aspect, then under its spiritual aspect, dwell on what makes its infinite value, rest in this gaze of fruitful faith. For this consideration and adherence of faith, some words of the Gospel or of the liturgy often suffice. For more advanced souls, they are like grains of incense on the fire of charity. It is not necessary to reason much; the simple act of theological faith is superior to reasoning, and becomes more and more a simple gaze, which, when accompanied by admiration and love, merits the name of contemplation. This infused faith, superior to all philosophy and to the discursive work of theology, makes us adhere infallibly and supernaturally in obscurity to the mysteries which the elect contemplate openly in heaven. As St. Paul says, it is “the substance of things to be hoped for.”¹¹²² Its obscurity does not hinder it from being infallibly sure. It is the first light of our interior life. “Credo in unum Deum...” And at a given moment, this Credo seems almost to become a video, as if we saw from afar the fountain of living water to which our soul aspires.

This gaze of faith on the truth and goodness of God gives spontaneous rise to an act of hope. The soul desires beatitude, eternal life, the peace promised by the heavenly Father to those who follow Jesus Christ. But we know for a certainty that by our own natural powers we shall never reach this supernatural end. Then we have recourse to the infinitely helpful goodness of God and beg Him for His grace. Petition, inspired by hope, relies on the divine help.¹¹²³ Having said Credo, the soul

spontaneously says: desidero, sitio, spero, I desire, I thirst, I hope. Having glimpsed from afar the fountain of living water, the soul desires to reach it that it may there drink long draughts, “as the hart panteth after the fountains of water.”¹¹²⁴

But the act of hope, in its turn, disposes us to an act of charity. As, indeed, St. Thomas says: “From the fact that man hopes to obtain a benefit from God, he is led to think that God, his benefactor, is good in Himself (and better than His gifts). This is why hope disposes us to love God for Himself.”¹¹²⁵

Thus, the act of charity rises spontaneously in us, at first under an affective form. If, in these affections, our sensibility offers its help to the will vivified by charity, it may be useful on condition that it remain subordinate. But this help is not necessary; it disappears in aridities. Here we need a calm but profound affection, which is surer and more fruitful than superficial emotions. It consists in saying: “My God, I no longer wish to lie when I tell Thee that I love Thee. Grant me to love Thee and to please Thee in all things.” “Diligo te, Domine, ex toto corde.”

This affective charity should finally become effective: “I wish to conform my will to the divine will. May Thy will be accomplished in me by fidelity to the commandments and to the spirit of the counsels. I wish to break all that renders me the slave of sin, of pride, of egoism, and of sensuality. I wish, O Lord, to share more and more in the divine life that Thou dost offer me. Thou hast come that we may have life in abundance. Increase my love for Thee. Thou dost ask only to give; I wish to receive as Thou dost wish that I should receive, in trial as well as in consolation; whether Thou comest to associate me with the joyful mysteries of Thy childhood or the sorrowful mysteries of Thy passion, for they all lead to the glorious life of eternity. Today I resolve to be faithful on a certain point that I have often neglected. Volo.” As St. Teresa ¹¹²⁶ suggests, the Pater noster may be slowly meditated in this manner.

Here, in this culminating point of prayer, the fruit of the theological virtues, the knowledge of faith, the love of hope, and that of charity tend, under the influence of the Holy Ghost, to fuse in a gaze of faithful and generous love, which is the beginning of contemplation: Christian contemplation which bears on God and the humanity of Christ, as the contemplation of the artist on nature, and that of a mother on the countenance of her child.

This prayer begins to penetrate and to taste the mysteries of salvation: the nature of the indwelling of the Blessed Trinity in our souls, the mystical body of Christ, and the communion of the saints.

Gradually it introduces us into the intimacy of Christ, the intimacy of love. Nothing can better correct our defects of character, give us a lively desire to resemble Him who said to us: “Learn of Me, because I am meek, and humble of heart: and you shall find rest to your souls.” Prayer thus made renders our hearts more and more like the Sacred Heart of Jesus, for one imitates, even without being aware of it, those whom one loves truly and deeply. There are difficult characters who will succeed in reforming themselves only by the loving contemplation of Christ in prayer.

These ideas should give us a better understanding of St. Teresa’s definition of prayer, which we quoted at the beginning of the chapter and repeat here: “Mental prayer is nothing else, in my opinion, but being on terms of friendship with God, frequently conversing in secret with Him who, as we know, loves us.”

THE PRAYER OF SIMPLICITY

In proportion as the soul grows, the acts of humility, faith, hope, and charity, which we have enumerated, tend, under the influence of the Holy Ghost, to fuse in a gaze of ardent love. Hence a simple method, useful at the beginning, should gradually give place to docility to the Holy Ghost, who breathes where He will. Prayer thus tends to become a prolonged spiritual communion, as the peasant of Ars, whom we quoted above, defined it: “I look at our Lord, and He looks at me.” The prayerful soul says much in a few words, which he often says over and over without ever repeating himself. This prolonged spiritual communion is like the breathing of the soul or its repose in God; by faith and hope it breathes in the truth and goodness of God, and it breathes out love. What the soul receives from God under the form of ever new graces, it gives back to Him under the form of adoration and love.

Consequently, to ask for the grace of Christian contemplation is to ask that the bandage of pride, which still covers the eyes of the spirit, may fall away completely in order that we may be able truly to penetrate and taste the great mysteries of salvation: that of the sacrifice of the cross perpetuated by the Mass, that of the sacrament of the Eucharist, the food of our soul.

Surely without any danger of quietism, Bossuet invites us to this simplified affective prayer in his substantial little work, *Maniere courte et facile pour faire l’oraison en foi, et de simple presence de Dieu*. We shall quote the principal part.

A person must become accustomed to nourish his soul with a simple and loving gaze on God and on Jesus Christ our Lord; and to this end, it must be gently separated from reasoning, discourse, and the multitude of affections, in order to hold it in simplicity, respect, and attention, and thus to bring it nearer and nearer to God, its unique, sovereign Good, its first principle and last end.

The perfection of this life consists in union with our sovereign Good; and the greater the simplicity, the more perfect also is the union. This is why grace interiorly solicits those who wish to be perfect to become simple that they may finally be rendered capable of the enjoyment of the one thing necessary, of eternal unity.... *Unum mihi est necessarium, Deus meus et omnia!*...

Meditation is very good in its time and very useful at the beginning of the spiritual life; but we should not stop there, since the soul, by its fidelity in mortifying and recollecting itself, ordinarily receives a purer and more intimate prayer, which may be called the prayer of simplicity. This prayer consists in a simple view, a gaze on God, on Jesus Christ, or on one of His mysteries. Therefore, leaving reasoning behind, the soul makes use of a sweet contemplation which holds it peaceful, attentive, and susceptible to the divine operations and impressions which the Holy Ghost communicates to it. It does little and receives much... and, as it draws nearer to the source of all light, grace, and virtue, it is also proportionately expanded....

We should observe that this true simplicity makes us live in a continual death and a perfect detachment, because it makes us go to God with perfect uprightness, without pausing over any creature. However, this grace of simplicity is not obtained by speculation, but by a great purity of heart and true mortification and self-contempt; whoever flees suffering, humiliation, and death to self will never enter it. This is also the reason why there are so few who advance in it, because hardly anyone wishes to give up self; and unless he does so, he experiences great losses and deprives himself of incomprehensible goods.... Fidelity which makes one die to self prepares... for this excellent type of prayer....

The enlightened soul dearly esteems the guidance of God, who allows it to be exercised by creatures and overwhelmed by temptations and abandonment.... After the purgation of the soul by the purgatory of sufferings, through which one must necessarily pass, will come illumination, rest, and joy through intimate union with God.

The purgatory of sufferings, which Bossuet speaks of here as necessary before illumination, is the passive purification of the senses which we shall discuss farther on: it is, in fact, at the threshold of the illuminative way, like a second conversion.

How to Attain to the Life of Prayer and Persevere in It

We have defined prayer and explained how that of beginners tend to become increasingly simple in order that it may become the prayer of simplicity described by Bossuet. We shall now explain how a person can attain to the life of prayer thus conceived and persevere in it.

HOW TO ATTAIN TO THIS LIFE

We must remember, first of all, that prayer depends especially on the grace of God; hence we prepare for it far less by processes, which might remain mechanical, than by humility, for “God... giveth grace to the humble,”¹¹²⁷ and He makes us humble in order to load us with His gifts. To remind us of the necessity of humility and simplicity, or purity of intention, Christ said to his apostles: “Unless you be converted and become as little children, you shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven,”¹¹²⁸ especially into the intimacy of the kingdom, or into the life of prayer. God Himself is pleased to instruct immediately those who are truly humble of heart; such was the peasant of Ars who remained for a long time in silence near the tabernacle, in intimate and wordless conversation with our Lord. If we love to be nothing, to accept contempt, and not only accept it, but end by loving it, we shall make great progress in prayer; we shall be loaded with gifts far beyond all our desires.

Preparation for the life of prayer depends not only on humility, but also on mortification, which is the spirit and practice of detachment from sensible things and from self. Clearly, if our minds are preoccupied with worldly interests and affairs, and our souls agitated by too human an affection, by jealousy, by the memory of wrongs done us by our neighbor, or by rash judgments, we shall not be able to converse with our Lord. If in the course of the day we criticize our superiors or fail in docility toward them, when evening comes we shall hardly be likely to find the presence of God in prayer. Therefore all inordinate inclinations must be mortified so that charity may take the uncontested first place in our soul and rise spontaneously toward God in distress as well as in consolation.

To attain to the life of prayer, we must, in the course of the day, often lift our hearts to God, converse with Christ about everything, as with the guide who leads us in our ascent; and then when we stop for a moment to chat more intimately with our Guide, we shall have something to say to Him; above all, we shall know how to listen to His inspirations because we shall be on holy and intimate terms with Him. To reach this intimacy, young religious are often taught to “sanctify the hour” when it strikes, that is, to offer it to the Lord in order to be more united to Him during the following period of time. It is also advised, especially on certain feast days or on the first Friday of the month, to multiply from morning until evening acts of love of God and our neighbor, not in a mechanical manner, such as counting them, but as the occasion presents itself: for example, on meeting a person, whether that person be naturally congenial to us or not. If we are faithful to this practice, we shall find when evening comes that we are closely united to God.

Finally, we must create silence in our soul; we must quiet our more or less inordinate passions in order to hear the interior Master, who speaks in a low voice as a friend to his friend. If we are habitually preoccupied with ourselves, seek ourselves in our work, in study and exterior activity, how shall we delight in the sublime harmonies of the mysteries of the Blessed Trinity present in us, of the redemptive Incarnation, and of the Eucharist? The disorder and clamor of our sensibility must truly cease for the life of prayer. Therefore the Lord at times so profoundly cultivates the sensible appetites, especially in the passive night of the senses, that they may eventually become silent and submit with docility to the mind or to the superior part of the soul.

All this work of life may be called the remote preparation for prayer. It is far more important than the immediate preparation, that is, than the choice of a subject; for this latter preparation has as its object only to excite the fire of charity, which ought never to be extinguished in us and which should be continually fed with a generosity sustained by fidelity to the duty of the present moment.

To further this remote preparation, we must advise what has been called prayer while working; in other words, choosing about a quarter of an hour in the middle of the morning or afternoon, in the very midst of our work, whether intellectual or external, with the intention, not of interrupting it, but of accomplishing it in a holier manner under the eye of God. This practice is most profitable. By it we reach the point of no longer seeking self in our work, of renouncing what is too natural and somewhat egotistical in our activity, so that we may sanctify it and preserve union with God by placing all our energies at His service, by freeing ourselves from complacency in personal satisfaction.

Thus generous and simple souls, in the wide sense of the term, will reach an uninterrupted conformity with the divine will

and will practically always preserve the presence of God, which will render the immediate preparation for prayer less necessary. They will be already disposed, inclined to turn to God, as the stone turns toward the center of the earth as soon as a void is created beside it. They will thus reach a true life of prayer, which will be for them a kind of spiritual respiration.

HOW TO PERSEVERE IN THE LIFE OF PRAYER

With perseverance much can be gained; without it, everything can be lost. Perseverance is not easy: a struggle must be carried on against self, against spiritual sloth, against the devil, who inclines us to discouragement. Many souls, on being deprived of the first consolations which they received, turn back; among them are souls that had made considerable advance. We may cite the case of St. Catherine of Genoa, who from the age of thirteen was drawn by God to prayer and made great progress in it; after five years of suffering, she abandoned the interior life, and for the next five years led a completely exterior life. However, one day when, on the advice of her sister, she was going to confession, she experienced with anguish the profound void in her soul; the desire of God revived in her.

In an instant she was taken back by God in the strongest, most imperious manner and, after fourteen years of great penance, she received assurance that she had fully satisfied divine justice. "If I should turn back," she said then, "I should wish my eyes to be torn out, and even that would not seem sufficient." Such vigorous words of the saints express concretely what all theologians say abstractly: that it is better to lose one's sight than to lose grace, or even to retrogress on the way to eternity. For anyone who knows the value of life, the value of time in relation to eternity, this statement is incontestable. It is, therefore, most important to persevere and to press forward.

Some souls, after struggling for a long time, become discouraged when they are perhaps only a few steps from the fountain of living water. Then, without prayer, they no longer have the strength to carry the cross generously; they let themselves slip into an easy, superficial life, in which others might perhaps be saved, but in which they run the risk of being lost. Why is this? Because their vigorous faculties, which were made to seek God, will incline them, in their search for the absolute which they desire, to look for it where it is not. For certain strong souls, mediocrity is not possible; if they do not give themselves entirely to God on the road of sanctity, they will belong wholly to themselves. They will wish to spend their life enjoying their ego; they run the risk of turning away from God and of placing their last end in the satisfaction of their pride or of their concupiscences. In this respect, certain souls somewhat resemble the angels. The angel, says St. Thomas, is either very holy or very wicked; there is no middle course. The angel makes a choice either of ardent charity or of irremissible mortal sin; venial sin is impossible for a pure spirit, since immediately seeing the end, its will is completely engaged. Either it becomes holy, forever established in supernatural good, or it turns away from God forever.¹¹²⁹

Some souls absolutely need prayer, intimate and profound prayer; another form of prayer will not suffice for them. There are very intelligent people whose character is difficult, intellectuals who will dry up in their work, in study, in seeking themselves therein with pride, unless they lead a life of true prayer, which for them should be a life of mental prayer. It alone can give them a childlike soul in regard to God, to the Savior, and to the Blessed Virgin. It alone can teach them the profound meaning of Christ's words: "Unless... you become as little children, you shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven." It is, therefore, important, especially for certain souls, to persevere in prayer; unless they do so, they are almost certain to abandon the interior life and perhaps come to ruin.

To persevere in prayer two things are necessary: to have confidence in Christ, who calls all pious souls to the living waters of prayer, and humbly to allow ourselves to be led by the road He Himself has chosen for us. First of all, we must have confidence in Him. We fail in this regard when, after the first slightly prolonged periods of aridity, we decide that prayer is not for us, nor we for it. On this score, we might as well say, as the Jansenists did, that frequent Communion is not for us, but only for a few great saints. Our Lord calls all souls to this intercourse of friendship with Him. He compares Himself to the good shepherd, who leads his sheep to the eternal pastures, that they may feed on the word of God. In these pastures is the fountain of living water of which Christ spoke to the Samaritan woman, who was, nevertheless, a sinner: "If thou didst know the gift of God, and who He is that saith to thee: Give Me to drink; thou perhaps wouldst have asked of Him, and He would have given thee living water."¹¹³⁰ Likewise at Jerusalem on a festal day, "Jesus stood and cried, saying: If any man thirst, let him come to Me, and drink. He that believeth in Me, as the Scripture saith: Out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water. Now this He said of the Spirit which they should receive who believed in Him."¹¹³¹

The fountain of water (*fons vivus*) is the Holy Ghost, who has been sent to us, who is given to us with infused charity which unites us to Him. Moreover, He has been given to us as interior Master and Comforter to make us penetrate and taste the inner meaning of the Gospel: "The Paraclete, the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring all things to your mind, whatsoever I shall have said to you."¹¹³² This was realized for the apostles on Pentecost, and for us, proportionately, on the day of our confirmation. Therefore St. John writes to the simple faithful in his First Epistle: "You have the unction from the Holy One.... Let the unction, which you have received from Him, abide in you.... His unction

teacheth you of all things”¹¹³³ useful to salvation.

St. Paul says also: “The charity of God is poured forth in our hearts by the Holy Ghost, who is given to us.”¹¹³⁴ The Holy Ghost is thus in all the just, in every soul in the state of grace. He, who is subsistent Love itself, dwells in us, not to remain idle but to operate in us, to be our interior Master by His seven gifts, which are permanent, infused dispositions given to assure our docility to Him. These dispositions grow in us with charity. Therefore, if we do not better hear the holy inspirations of the interior Master, it is because we are listening too intently to ourselves and are not sufficiently desirous of the profound reign of God in us. To persevere in prayer, we must, therefore, have confidence in Christ and in the Holy Ghost whom He has sent to us.

Finally, we must allow ourselves to be led by the path which our Lord has chosen for us. There is, to be sure, the common and indispensable way, that of humility and conformity to the divine will; hence we must all pray as the publican did. But on this common road, one part is shaded, the other has nothing to protect it from the burning rays of the sun; one section is flat, followed by long, steep hills that lead to high plateaus where we may enjoy a marvelous view. The good Shepherd leads His sheep as He judges best. Some He guides by the parables, others by the way of reasoning; to others He gives, in the obscurity of faith, simple and penetrating intuition, great views of the whole, which are the distinctive characteristic of wisdom. He leaves certain souls for a rather long time in difficulties in order to inure them to the struggle. For several years St. Teresa herself had to make use of a book in order to meditate, and the time seemed very long to her. Our Lord raises the Marys rather than the Marthas to contemplation, but the former find therein intimate sufferings unknown to the latter; and if the latter are faithful, they will reach the living waters and will slake their thirst according to their desire.

We must, therefore, allow ourselves to be led by the road which the Lord has chosen for us. If aridity is prolonged, we should know that it does not spring from lukewarmness, provided that we have no taste for the things of the world but rather concern for our spiritual progress. Aridity, on the contrary, is very useful, like fire that must dry out the wood before setting it ablaze. Aridity is needed precisely to dry up our too lively, too impetuous, exuberant, and tumultuous sensibility, so that finally the sensible appetites may be quieted and become submissive to the spirit; so that, above these passing emotions, there may grow in us the strong and pure love of charity, which has its seat in the elevated part of the soul.

Then if we are faithful, as St. Thomas teaches,¹¹³⁵ we shall gradually begin to contemplate God in the mirror of sensible things, or in that of the parables. Our soul will rise from one of these parables to the thought of infinite mercy, by a straight movement, like that of a lark soaring directly from earth toward heaven.

At other times we shall contemplate God in the mirror of the mysteries of salvation, aiding ourselves, for example, by recalling the mysteries of the Rosary. By a spiral (oblique) movement analogous to the flight of the swallow, we shall rise from the joyful to the sorrowful mysteries, and to those which announce the life of heaven.

Finally, on certain days we shall contemplate God in Himself, holding fast in the obscurity of faith to the thought of His infinite goodness which communicates to us all the blessings we receive. By a circular movement similar to that of the eagle high in the air, we shall repeatedly come back to this thought of the divine goodness. And, whereas the egoist always thinks of himself and refers everything to himself, we shall begin to think always of God dwelling in us, and to refer everything to Him. Then, even when the most unforeseen and painful events occur, we shall think of the glory of God and of the manifestation of His goodness, and we shall glimpse from afar the supreme Good toward which everything, trials as well as joys, should converge. This is truly the life of prayer, which allows us to see all things in God; it is the normal prelude of eternal life.

Retarded Souls

At the beginning of the third part of this work, we shall speak of the second conversion through which one passes, with greater or lesser generosity, from the purgative way of beginners to the illuminative way of the advanced. Some souls, because of their negligence or spiritual sloth, do not pass from the age of beginners to that of proficients. These are retarded souls; in the spiritual life they are like abnormal children, who do not happily pass through the crisis of adolescence and who, though they do not remain children, never reach the full development of maturity. Thus these retarded souls belong neither among beginners nor among proficients. Unfortunately they are numerous.

Of these retarded souls, some who formerly served God with fidelity are now in a state bordering on indifference. Though in the past they knew true spiritual fervor, we may say without fear of rash judgment that they seriously misused divine graces. Had it not been for this misuse, as a matter of fact the Lord would have continued what He had begun in them, for He does not refuse His help to those who do what is in their power to obtain it.

How did these souls reach this state of tepidity? As a rule, two principal causes are indicated: the neglect of little things in the service of God and the refusal to make the sacrifices He asks.

THE NEGLECT OF LITTLE THINGS

The neglect of little things seems slight in itself, but it may become grave in its results. Our daily merit is ordinarily constituted by little acts of virtue from morning to night. As drops of water gradually wear away a stone, as drops of rain render the dried-up earth fertile, so our good acts by their repetition engender a good habit, an acquired virtue; they preserve it and increase it; and, if they proceed from a supernatural or infused virtue, they obtain the increase of this virtue.

In the service of God, things which seem small in themselves are great in their relation to our last end, to God who should be loved, above all else. They are also great by reason of the supernatural spirit of faith, confidence, and love which should make us accomplish them. If we acted thus, we would live from morning to night in the presence of God, which is infinitely precious; and we would live by Him, by His spirit, instead of living by the natural spirit in accordance with the inclination of egoism. Little by little there would grow up in us zeal for the glory of God and the salvation of souls. Unless we strive in this way, we may end by following the downward path of practical naturalism, allowing ourselves to be dominated by the more or less unconscious gross selfishness which inspires many of our acts.

The neglect of little things in the service of God leads rapidly to neglect of great things: for example, in the case of a priest or religious, it leads to the recitation of the Office without true piety, to scarcely any preparation for Mass, to saying Mass hastily or assisting at it without the requisite attention, to replacing thanksgiving by the obligatory recitation of a part of the Office, so that all personal piety disappears and gradually gives place to piety that is, in a way, official and exterior. If a priest were to follow this downward path, he would little by little become a mere functionary of God. He would end by treating holy things with carelessness, whereas, on the other hand, he would perhaps acquit himself with the utmost seriousness in those duties which assure his reputation as a professor, writer, lecturer, or man of affairs. Gradually emphasis would be shifted from what is of greatest moment in life to what is secondary. The holy Sacrifice of the Mass, which perpetuates in substance on our altars the sacrifice of the cross and applies its fruits to us, is evidently the most serious and greatest thing in life for the priest and the true Christian. A Mass well celebrated or well heard with a spirit of faith is far superior to our personal activity; it orientates this activity toward its true supernatural end and renders it fruitful. On the contrary, we swerve from this end when we reach the stage of seeking self in our activity, to the point of forgetting the salvation of souls and all that it demands on our part. Neglect of little things in the service of God may lead us to this forgetfulness, which renders everything unfruitful.

We read, on the contrary, in St. Luke: "He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in that which is greater." ¹¹³⁶ Whoever is daily faithful to the smallest duties of Christian life, or to those of the religious life, will receive the grace to be faithful even to martyrdom, if he should have to bear witness to God in his blood. Then will be fully accomplished in him the words of the Gospel: "Well done, good and faithful servant; because thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will place thee over many things. Enter thou into the joy of thy Lord."¹¹³⁷ But whoever habitually neglects little things in the service of God, will end by neglecting great ones. How, then, will he accomplish the difficult acts that may be required of him?

THE REFUSAL OF SACRIFICES ASKED

A second cause of tepidity in retarded souls is the refusal to make the sacrifices which the Lord asks. Some persons feel themselves called to a more serious, a more perfect life, to true prayer, to the practice of humility, without which there are no true virtues; but these souls refuse, if not directly at least indirectly, by seeking diversion. They do not wish to hear the words that recur daily in the invitatory of Matins: "Today, if you shall hear His voice, harden not your hearts." Some, who are preoccupied with doing something, for example, a book, a work that would let the world know they exist, say to themselves from time to time: "First of all, it is essential to become an interior soul; if the soul is empty, it can give nothing. To do something exterior is unprofitable unless the soul is united to God." To become an interior soul, only some sacrifices of self-love would be necessary; God would have to be truly sought instead of self. Without these sacrifices, how can anyone enter on a true interior life? If these sacrifices are refused, the soul remains retarded; it may stay so permanently.

Then it loses zeal for the glory of God and the salvation of its neighbor, the fervor of charity. It falls into tepidity, which, with habitual negligence, is affection for venial sin or the disposition of the will to commit certain venial sins deliberately when the occasion presents itself. There is finally, as it were, the firm resolution to remain in this state. In addition to the lack of the spirit of sacrifice, other causes may produce this tepidity of retarded souls: namely, levity of spirit, the thoughtlessness with which one tells, for example, officious lies (i.e., lies of expediency) whenever the occasion offers; spiritual sloth, which leads finally to the abandonment of the spiritual war against our defects, against our predominant fault, which quite frequently tries to pass for a virtue, and gives rise in us to other more or less inordinate passions. A person thus arrives at carelessness and indifference in regard to perfection and no longer truly tends toward it. The fact that he has perhaps promised to tend toward it by the way of the counsels is forgotten, as is also the loftiness of the supreme precept: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart and with thy whole soul and with all thy strength and with all thy mind."¹¹³⁸

THE TENDENCY TO DERISION

Among the causes of tepidity in retarded souls, the tendency to derision should be particularly noted. St. Thomas speaks of the derider when he discusses the vices opposed to justice: insult, detraction, murmuring against the reputation of our neighbor. He points out¹¹³⁹ that to deride or to ridicule someone, is to show that we do not esteem him; and derision, says the saint, may become a mortal sin if it affects persons or things that deserve high esteem. It is a grievous sin to ridicule the things of God, or our parents, or superiors, or good persons who lead a virtuous life. Derision may even become very grievous by reason of its consequences, for it may turn weak souls forever away from the practice of good. Job replied to his friends: "He that is mocked by his friends as I, shall call upon God; and He will hear him. For the simplicity of the just man is laughed to scorn."¹¹⁴⁰ But it is also said of deriders: "He that dwelleth in heaven shall laugh at them."¹¹⁴¹ The terrible irony of heaven will chastise that of earth.

The derider is himself a retarded soul, holding others back and becoming, often without being aware of it, the instrument of the spirit of evil. His cast of soul, which is the direct opposite of evangelical simplicity, is the one most opposed to supernatural contemplation. The derider, who wishes "to play the rogue," ridicules the just man who tends truly to perfection; he emphasizes the latter's defects and depreciates his good qualities. Why is this? Because he feels that he himself has little virtue, and he is unwilling to admit his inferiority. Then, out of spite, he lessens the real and fundamental value of his neighbor and the necessity of virtue itself. He may greatly harm weak souls which he intimidates, and, while working his own ruin, he may labor at their perdition.

THE UNHAPPY RESULTS OF THIS STATE

The saints tell us that retarded and tepid souls may reach such a state of blindness of spirit and hardness of heart that it is very difficult to reform them. This statement is borne out by St. Bernard, who says: "You will more easily see a great number of seculars renounce vice and embrace virtue than a single religious pass from tepidity to fervor."¹¹⁴² The higher a retarded or tepid soul has been raised, the more deplorable is its fall and also the more difficult is its conversion; in fact, it reaches the point where it judges its state to be satisfactory, and no longer has a desire to ascend higher. When the time of the Lord's visit is disregarded, He sometimes returns only after long petitions. Retarded souls are in danger; they should be entrusted to the Blessed Virgin Mary, who alone can bring them back to the Savior and obtain for them the graces that will rekindle in them the desire for perfection.

On this subject Father Lallemand, S.J., wrote a striking chapter reminiscent of certain pages from the writings of St. Catherine of Siena and of Tauler. Lallemand's beautiful book, *The Spiritual Doctrine*, contains the following statement:

In a community there may be four classes of religious: some perfect; others wicked, haughty, full of vanity, sensual, enemies of regularity; others tepid, cowardly, indifferent; and finally, the virtuous who tend to perfection, although they may perhaps never reach it.

Religious belonging to these four classes may be found in the holiest religious orders, as well as in those communities which have fallen into relaxed condition; with this difference, however, that in an order which has fallen from its first fervor, the larger number belong to the tepid group, and the remainder is composed of a few wicked

souls, of a small number who work at their perfection, and of a very limited number of perfect souls. But in an order in which regular observance is still in its vigor, the bulk of the community is composed of those who tend to perfection, and the remainder comprises a few perfect souls, a small number of tepid religious, and very few wicked souls.

We may make a very important observation here: that is, that a religious order leans toward decadence when the number of the tepid begins to equal that of the fervent. By the fervent, I mean those who strive from day to day to make fresh progress in prayer, recollection, mortification, purity of conscience, and humility. Those who do not make this effort should be considered tepid, although they may keep from mortal sin; they corrupt many others, do extreme harm to the whole body, and are themselves in danger, either of not persevering in their vocation, or of falling into interior pride or great darkness.

The duty of superiors in religious houses is to act in such a way, as well by their good example as their exhortations, their individual conferences, and their prayers, that their inferiors may remain in the ranks of the fervent who tend to perfection; otherwise, the superiors themselves will bear the punishment, and a terrible punishment it will be.^{[1143](#)}

All this is only too true and shows how easy it is to become a retarded soul, to stray from the road of perfection, by ceasing to live according to the spirit of faith. Then, evidently, it becomes difficult to admit that the contemplation of the mysteries of faith is in the normal way of sanctity; or one may conclude that this doctrine seems true in theory, but is little in accord with the facts. To tell the truth, we should say that, as a matter of fact, many souls remain retarded; they are not in order; they do not really tend toward perfection and certainly do not nourish themselves sufficiently with the mysteries of faith, with the mystery of the Mass, at which, however, they frequently assist, but in a manner that is not sufficiently interior to assure the progress that should be made.

Father Lallemant adds:

There are four things prejudicial to the spiritual life, and on them are based the evil maxims that slip into holy communities: (1) the esteem of purely human talents and qualities; (2) the care to make friends for solely human reasons; (3) a politic conduct directed only by human prudence, a spirit that is sly and opposed to evangelical simplicity; (4) superfluous recreations which the soul seeks or conversations and reading which give a wholly natural satisfaction to the mind.^{[1144](#)}

These four enemies of the spiritual life give rise, as Father Lallemant points out in this same chapter, to ambition, the desire for eminent positions or the wish to make a reputation for oneself in the sciences, and the seeking after one's ease; all of which are manifestly opposed to spiritual progress.

In this discussion of retarded souls, a most important consideration should be noted: namely, that we must be on the alert to preserve in our souls the subordination of the natural activity of the mind to the essentially supernatural virtues, especially to the three theological virtues. These three infused virtues and their acts are certainly very superior to the natural activity of the mind necessary for the study of the sciences, of philosophy, and of theology. To deny this truth would be a heresy; but it is not sufficient to admit it in theory. Otherwise we would end by really preferring the study of philosophy and theology to the superior life of faith, to prayer, to the love of God and of souls, to the celebration of the holy Sacrifice of the Mass, which would be hurriedly celebrated without any spirit of faith, in order to give more time to a piece of work, to an intellectual overloading that would remain quite empty and fruitless, because it would be destitute of the spirit that ought to animate it. Thus we would fall into an evil intellectualism, in which there would be something like the hypertrophy of the reasoning powers to the detriment of the life of faith, of true piety, and of the indispensable training of the will. Then charity, the highest of the theological virtues, would no longer truly hold the first place in the soul, which might remain forever retarded and in part fruitless.

To remedy this retardation, we should often recall that God in His mercy continually offers us the grace to make us daily fulfill a little better the supreme precept, that is, the duty to tend toward the perfection of charity: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart and with thy whole soul and with all thy strength and with all thy mind: and thy neighbor as thyself."^{[1145](#)} Let us remember that in the evening of life we shall be judged on the sincerity of our love of God.

THE INCLINATION TO EGOISM THAT REMAINS IN US

Tauler in his sermons often speaks of two inclinations in us, the one good, the other evil. His disciples gathered up his preaching on this subject in the third chapter of *The Institutions*. At this point in our study, we must emphasize the essential elements of this teaching, by noting the indications of the inclination that seeks self, and by showing how to bring about the predominance of the other fundamental inclination by means of which we are in the image of God.

Since all our works draw their value from the intention and love which produce them, and since all should spring from the love of God, we ought often to recall the fact that all sins and eternal damnation come from an evil inclination which seeks self and is opposed to God.

Christ Himself declares: "Unless the grain of wheat falling into the ground die, itself remaineth alone, but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit." This is equivalent to saying that without the death of the evil inclination in us our soul will never become rich in merits, in fruits of life for eternity. If, on the contrary, the evil inclination dies, then the seed of eternal life will grow in us. The knowledge of this evil inclination is, therefore, more useful to man than knowledge of the entire universe.

By what traits can this evil inclination be recognized? Simply by the fact that it continually seeks self rather than God in everything. If at times it gives evidence of love for God and neighbor, such a manifestation is only a deception and an illusion. This inclination fancies that it possesses justice and goodness; it often glories in its works, but chiefly in such as have some appearance of virtue and holiness. It takes delight in them, attributes them to itself, and, although it does not love true virtues, it seeks the praise that is due them.

This evil inclination considers its sins as trifles. Such an attitude is a proof that it is destitute of true light and does not know what sin is; for, if it had a true and clear understanding of what it is to turn away from God, the sovereign Good, it would doubtless not willingly consent to do so.

This same inclination makes an effort always to appear good, although it is not. For this reason, some people would not dare to grieve anyone by a reproof because they could not endure a cross reply. This inclination at times even imagines that it loves God fervently, and consequently it reprehends its neighbor for his sins with extreme asperity. “But,” says Tauler, “if it could see its own sins, it would completely forget those of others, no matter how great they might be.”¹¹⁴⁶

Every time this inclination is reprov'd, it strives to justify and defend itself, and cannot bear to be corrected. It tells itself that others have their defects, but that it has always acted with a good intention or through ignorance or weakness. This inclination reaches the point of persuading itself that it seeks God in everything, whereas in reality it seeks itself always and lives only on appearances and externals. It prefers appearance to reality. Therefore it seeks itself even in prayer and the taste for spiritual things, in interior consolations turning the gifts of heaven, whether interior or exterior, and even God Himself, to its own satisfaction. If it happens to lose an object of its delight, it immediately seeks another, in order to rest in it and to refer all to self.

HOW TO BRING ABOUT THE PREDOMINANCE OF THE OTHER INCLINATION, WHICH IS IN THE IMAGE OF GOD

To bring about the predominance of the good inclination, man must be a severe guardian and observer of self, of his exterior and interior senses. He must not allow his senses to become dissipated, to run after creatures. “He must,” says Tauler, “build a cell within his heart, withdraw to it and live in it as far as possible unknown to the whole world, that he may be less turned away from divine contemplation. He must not lose sight of the life and passion of our Savior.”¹¹⁴⁷ The consideration of Christ’s life and passion will give birth in him to the desire to resemble Christ by humility of heart, patience, meekness, true love of God and neighbor.

When a man finds that he is not conformed to the divine model, he will ask the Holy Ghost to give him the grace better to see the ugliness of sin and its deadly results. He will abase himself with sincerity and humility, but with confidence in infinite mercy, begging it to raise him up again.

The more a man promptly mortifies his evil inclination, the more living and beautiful the image of God that is in him becomes: the natural image, that is, the soul itself in so far as by nature it is spiritual and immortal, and the supernatural image, in other words, sanctifying grace from which spring the infused virtues and the gifts. Then gradually man begins to think frequently of God instead of thinking always of himself, and instead of seeking self by referring everything to self, he begins to seek God in everything that happens, to love Him truly, effectively, practically, and to refer all to Him.

Tauler concludes: “As long as you seek yourself, as you act for yourself, as you ask for the reward of and the wages for your actions, and cannot endure being known by others for what you really are, you dwell in illusion and error worthy of pity. When you despise another because of his defects, and when you wish to be preferred to those who do not live according to your maxims, you do not know yourself, you are still ignorant of the evil inclination that subsists in you.”¹¹⁴⁸ It is this inclination that hinders the image of God from being what it ought to be, so that the soul may truly bear the fruits of eternal life; therefore the necessity of knowing oneself profoundly in order to know God and to love Him truly.

These reflections on retarded souls lead us to speak of the necessity of the second conversion or passive purification of the senses, which marks, according to St. John of the Cross, the entrance into the illuminative way of the advanced. We will discuss this subject in the second volume of this work.

PART 3

The Illuminative Way of Proficients

The Object of the Third Part and the language of Spiritual Writers Compared with That of Theologians

In Part One of this work, we discussed the principles or the sources of the interior life, the organism of the virtues and the gifts, the nature of Christian perfection, its elevation, and the general obligation of every Christian and the special obligation of priests and religious to tend to perfection.

In Part Two we treated of the purification of the soul in beginners, of sins to be avoided, of the predominant fault, of the active purification of the senses and the spirit, especially of the active purification of the memory, the understanding, the will, and finally the mental prayer of beginners.

We shall now, logically, proceed to the consideration of the illuminative way of proficients, which is the continuation of the purgative way under another name. It is given a new name, just as one and the same road is called, progressively, different names according to the cities through which it passes: the railway from Turin to Rome is called, first of all, the Turin-Genoa Railroad, then the Genoa-Pisa, and lastly the Pisa-Rome Railroad.

Great variety may be found on the same road; one part crosses the plain, another climbs more or less steep slopes; part of the road can be covered in daylight, part at night, and that in fair or stormy weather. The same is true from the spiritual point of view. Further more, on a railroad connecting two cities, speed must not be excessive, or stops eliminated, or the wait at stations too much prolonged. Likewise on God's highway, progress would be compromised by a desire to travel too fast, whereas too great a delay in one place would put one behind schedule; in this sense, "Not to advance is to retrogress." The illuminative way is, therefore, the continuation of the purgative way, but in the former, progress should be more marked.

To discuss the illuminative way in a methodical manner, we shall treat of it in the following order:

(1) the entrance to this way; several writers have called it a second conversion and, more precisely, speaking, the passive purification of the senses;

(2) the principal characteristics of the spiritual age of proficients;

(3) the progress of the Christian moral virtues, especially of humility, a fundamental virtue, and of meekness in its relations with charity;

(4) the progress of the theological virtues, of the spirit of faith and confidence in God, of conformity to the signified divine will, of fraternal charity, the great sign of progress in the love of God;

(5) the gifts of the Holy Ghost in proficients, their docility to the Holy Ghost, their more continual recollection in the course of the day;

(6) the progressive illumination of the soul by the Sacrifice of the Mass and Communion; why each Communion should be substantially more fervent than the preceding one; devotion to the Eucharistic Heart of Jesus and to Mary Mediatrix, in this period of the interior life;

(7) the contemplative prayer of proficients and its degrees; the error of the quietists on this subject; the passage from acquired prayer to infused prayer. Is infused prayer in the normal way of sanctity, or is it, on the contrary, an extraordinary grace, like visions, revelations, the stigmata? Is infused prayer ordinarily granted to generous, interior souls, who persevere in prayer and docility to the Holy Ghost, and who daily bear the cross with patience and love?

(8) the defects of proficients; the pride which mingles in their acts; the discernment of spirits; retarded proficients; the necessity of a passive purification of the spirit which, according to St. John of the Cross, marks the entrance into the unitive way.

Why do we propose to follow this order? Because it is fitting to consider the growth of the virtues and of the gifts before the progress of their acts, in order to show more clearly to what already elevated acts this growth of the virtues and of the gifts, which is a trustworthy sign of progress, is ordained. We are, in fact, already certain through faith and theology that the acquired virtues and the infused virtues, as well as the seven gifts, should always grow in us here on earth, particularly in the illuminative way or that of proficients. In this stage there should even be an acceleration in this progress, for the soul ought to advance more rapidly toward God as it approaches Him more closely and is more drawn by Him, just as the stone falls more rapidly as it draws near the earth which attracts it.¹¹⁴⁹ The traveler toward eternity should advance more rapidly as he approaches the end which captivates him more. We have already shown these principles to be certain; there should, consequently, be a very notable increase in the virtues and the gifts in the illuminative way of proficients. Profound consideration of this fact will make us understand better what the elevation of the acts of these virtues and gifts should

normally be in this period of the spiritual life.

Moreover, that we may proceed with order, it is fitting that we follow an ascending course, considering first of all the increase of the Christian moral virtues, next that of the theological virtues, then that of the gifts which perfect the virtues, and finally the graces of light, love, and strength which are given us daily by Mass and Communion. If we follow this plan, we shall see more clearly that the prayer of proficients is normally a contemplative prayer. If, on the contrary, we discuss this prayer at the very beginning, we might describe it as it actually is in those who appear to be proficients without perhaps really being so, and not such as it should normally be in this already advanced age of the spiritual life. These are the reasons for the order we shall follow.

Before beginning our study, however, we shall here examine an important preliminary question, that of the essential character of the language of the great spiritual writers who have discussed these matters, language having terms that are somewhat different from those used by theologians. A comparison of these two terminologies or ways of speaking is necessary here.

THE LANGUAGE OF SPIRITUAL WRITERS COMPARED WITH THAT OF THEOLOGIAN

It has often been remarked that great spiritual writers, especially when they discuss mysticism properly so called, use terms that differ notably from those used by theologians. For a clear grasp of the meaning and import of each set of terms, a comparison of the two is necessary.

The language of the great Catholic mystics has its basis in Scripture, in the Psalms, the Canticle of Canticles, the Gospel of St. John, and the Epistles of St. Paul. It takes shape increasingly with St. Augustine in his commentaries on the Psalms and on St. John; with Dionysius; St. Gregory the Great in his commentary on Job; St. Bernard; Hugh and Richard of St. Victor; St. Bonaventure; the author of *The Imitation*; Tauler; Blessed Henry Suso; St. Teresa; St. John of the Cross; and St. Francis de Sales.

Their terminology, the expression of their mystical experience, gradually passed into doctrinal, spiritual theology, which should compare it with the scholastic terminology of theologians in order to avoid certain errors or confusions into which Master Eckart occasionally fell.

THE QUESTION RAISED BY THE LANGUAGE OF THE MYSTICS

At first glance, the vocabulary of great spiritual writers seems to a number of exclusively scholastic theologians too metaphorical and also exaggerated, either in what relates to the abnegation necessary for perfection or in regard to the separation from the sensible and from reasoning or discourse in contemplation. For this reason, certain great mystics, such as Tauler and Ruysbroeck, seemed suspect; and, for the same reason, after the death of St. John of the Cross, some theologians felt they should correct his works and cover them over, as it were, with scholastic whitewash in order the better to explain their meaning and remove all exaggeration. Thus talent sometimes wishes to correct genius, as if the eaglet wished to teach the eagle to fly. It was then necessary to defend the mystics against their enemies and their injudicious friends. With this purpose Louis Blossius wrote a defense of Tauler, and Father Nicholas of Jesus Mary composed his book, *Elucidatio phrasium mysticorum operum Joannis a Cruce*.¹¹⁵⁰

An example of the difference between the language of spiritual writers and that of theologians may be illustrated by the meaning they give to the word “nature.” The speculative meaning of this word is abstract and has nothing unfavorable about it; its ascetical meaning is concrete and recalls original sin. We read in *The Imitation* in regard to the different movements of nature and grace: “Nature is crafty and draweth away many... and always proposes self as her end. But grace walketh in simplicity, turneth aside from all appearance of evil, offereth no deceits, and doth all things purely for God, in whom also it resteth as its last end.... Nature willingly receiveth honor and respect. But grace faithfully attributeth honor and glory to God.”¹¹⁵¹ These words at first seem contrary to the principles often formulated by St. Thomas: “Grace does not destroy nature, but perfects it”; “Nature inclines us to love God, its Author, more than ourselves; otherwise the natural inclination would be perverse, and it would not be perfected, but destroyed, by charity.”¹¹⁵²

Considering the matter with greater attention, we see that no contradiction exists between the author of *The Imitation* and St. Thomas, but they employ the word nature with two different meanings. St. Thomas takes it in the philosophical and abstract sense, which corresponds to the definition of man (a rational animal), to his nature, the radical principle of his operations, such as it comes from God, abstraction being made of every grace superior to it and also of original sin and its results. Human nature thus conceived corresponds to a divine idea. When spiritual writers, like the author of *The Imitation*, contrast nature and grace, they take the word nature in its ascetical and concrete meaning. They speak of nature such as it is concretely since the sin of the first man; in other words, turned away from God by original sin, or still wounded although regenerated by baptism. They wish to recall the fact that, even in baptized persons, the wounds, the results of original sin, are not completely

healed, but are in the process of healing. These wounds are four in number: weakness, ignorance, malice, and concupiscence. They affect the different faculties,¹¹⁵³ and often manifest themselves in a gross egoism, at times only slightly conscious, which personal sins can greatly augment. St. Thomas also insists on this point when he speaks of inordinate self-love, from which spring pride, the concupiscence of the flesh, that of the eyes;¹¹⁵⁴ and then when he speaks of the seven capital sins,¹¹⁵⁵ from which come other sins that are still more serious.

Careful thought on the matter shows that here there is not a contradiction in doctrine between speculative theologians and spiritual writers, but a difference of terminology which the context explains. One is more abstract, the other more concrete, for it aims at the application of principles for the conduct of life in conditions in which man actually finds himself since original sin.

For a clearer understanding of this difference, we shall speak of the theological bases of the terminology of spiritual writers, of the principal terms of their language, and we shall compare the expressive value of their language with the value of that of theologians.

THE THEOLOGICAL BASES OF THE TERMINOLOGY OF SPIRITUAL WRITERS

Each science or discipline has its special terms, the meaning of which cannot be clearly understood by those who do not know the subject. If mathematics, physics, and physiology have their particular set of terms, why should mysticism not have its terminology? Terms express ideas, as ideas express the nature of things, and the idea which at first was confused subsequently becomes distinct. Scientific concepts are thus more distinct than the notions of common sense, and sometimes new names are needed to express them; otherwise it would be necessary to have recourse to circumlocutions or excessively lengthy paraphrases.

Theology furnishes the basis of the terminology of spiritual writers when it teaches that, to speak of God and our supernatural life, we have two classes of terms, one set of which has a literal meaning, and the other a metaphorical meaning. Thus we say, using the literal meaning: "God is good and wise; He is goodness itself, wisdom itself." These are, in fact, perfections which imply no imperfection, and they are found analogically in God and in creatures according to their literal meaning. On the contrary, it is only metaphorically that we speak of the wrath of God; wrath is, in fact, a passion, a movement of the sensible appetite, which cannot, properly speaking, be found in God, who is pure spirit; but the expression "wrath of God" is a metaphor to denominate His justice.

On this subject we must make the following observations: among the analogical terms which denominate God literally, negative terms, like "immaterial" and "immobile," express Him more exactly than positive terms, inasmuch as we know rather what God is not than what He is.¹¹⁵⁶ We know very well that in Him there is neither matter, movement, progress, nor limit; whereas we cannot know positively the essential mode according to which the divine perfections are in God and are identified in the eminence of the Deity, in which they exist formally and eminently. We know this essential mode of the divine perfections in a negative and relative manner, saying: it is an uncreated, incomprehensible, supreme mode. But in itself it remains hidden, like the Deity, which is manifest only to the blessed who see it immediately.

Consequently, when the mystics speak of God, they use many negative terms, such as "incomprehensible," "ineffable," "incommunicable." They say that negative contemplation, which expresses itself in this manner, is superior to affirmative contemplation. In fact, negative contemplation attains in its way what is most lofty: the eminence of the Deity, or the inner life of God, which cannot be shared by nature, but only by sanctifying grace, which is a participation in the divine nature.

Moreover, among the positive names that are properly applied to God, the least definite and the more absolute and common denominate Him better than the others, says St. Thomas.¹¹⁵⁷ Thus the name, "He who is," is more properly applied to God than the others, for by its indetermination it better expresses the infinite ocean of the spiritual substance of God. On the contrary, more definite names, such as "intelligent," "free," fall short of this infinite mode. Therefore the mystics say that superior contemplation, which proceeds from faith illumined by the gifts, is confused, indistinct, ineffable; they place it above distinct contemplation which would come from a special revelation.

Metaphorical terms are necessary, says St. Thomas,¹¹⁵⁸ where there are no suitable terms, especially to express the particular relations of God with interior souls. Thus the mystics speak metaphorically of spiritual espousals and of spiritual marriage in order to designate as it were a transforming union of the soul with God. Likewise by metaphor they speak of the depth of the soul to designate the depth of the intellect and the will, where these faculties spring from the very substance of the soul. These metaphors are explained by the fact that we know spiritual things only in the mirror of sensible things, and that it is often difficult to find fitting terms to express them.

THE PRINCIPAL TERMS OF THE LANGUAGE OF SPIRITUAL WRITERS

The ordinary terms of Scripture and those of theology would suffice for mysticism; but to avoid excessively long

circumlocutions, spiritual writers have had recourse to special terms, or they have given a more particular meaning to expressions already in use. Thus several terms have become essentially mystical, to such an extent that if one took them in their scholastic meaning, they would no longer be true. All spiritual writers speak, for example, of the nothingness of the creature and say: the creature is nothing. A theologian, to render this proposition acceptable to his point of view, would add this precision: the creature by itself is nothing. Master Eckart's error consisted in affirming in the scholastic meaning of the word what is true only in a mystical sense. Consequently several of his propositions were condemned, among them the following: "All creatures are pure nothingness; I do not say that they are little, or something, but that they are pure nothingness."¹¹⁵⁹ If this were true, God would have created nothing outside of Himself, or rather the being of creatures would not be distinct from that of God.

Likewise the mystics have often called infused contemplation simply "contemplation," when, as a matter of fact, they mean infused contemplation. Thus a special terminology has gradually grown up. Its special character comes from the fact that the secrets of the inner life of God and of the union of the soul with Him are ineffable, or from the fact that the terms of human language have no proportion with the sublimity of divine things. To remedy this lack of proportion, spiritual writers have found three categories of terms which are essentially mystical. They may be classed as hyperbolical, antithetical or contrary, and symbolical terms.

Hyperbolical terms seek to express the infinite elevation of God, as for example, "the superessence or the supergoodness of God,"¹¹⁶⁰ or again the inferiority of the creature in relation to God, as "the nothingness of the creature."

Antithetical terms express something lofty by a sort of contrary effect which they produce on us. Thus the terms "dark night" and "great darkness" express "the inaccessible light in which God dwells," a light that dazzles us and affects us like a superior and transluminous obscurity, which is the direct opposite of the inferior obscurity which comes from matter, error, or evil. Likewise, by irony, the word of God is called foolishness, since it produces this effect on senseless people. With this meaning St. Paul writes: "For seeing that in the wisdom of God the world, by wisdom, knew not God, it pleased God, by the foolishness of our preaching, to save them that believe.... For the foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men."¹¹⁶¹

Symbolical terms are metaphors such as: the Spouse of souls (to designate God), the spiritual marriage, the depth of the soul, the spiritual senses, the sleep of the faculties, the wound of love, liquefaction and spiritual fusion.

It should be pointed out that certain mystics, such as Dionysius, have a preference for hyperbolical terms (for example, superessence, supergoodness); others, like St. John of the Cross, for antithetical terms (the dark night); others, as St. Teresa, for symbolical terms (spiritual espousals and marriage).

In these terms we have the principle that enables us to reconcile the degrees of prayer described by St. Teresa and those described by St. John of the Cross; the difference is to be found more in the terms than in the spiritual states indicated. Thus under the title of the dark night of the senses, St. John of the Cross speaks of the prayer of arid quiet, which precedes consoled quiet of which St. Teresa speaks in the fourth mansion. With regard to the dark night of the spirit St. John discusses graces of which St. Teresa treats in the sixth mansion in connection with the spiritual espousals, which, like the night of the spirit, proximately prepare the soul for the perfect transforming union, also called the spiritual marriage.

The terminology preferred by St. John of the Cross contributes to giving him a more austere tone than that of St. Teresa; but when he speaks of the summit of the interior life in *The Living Flame of Love*, he does so in terms that show a plenitude of most striking spiritual joy.

The meaning of mystical terms is well comprehended, with respect to what is at one and the same time disproportionate and suitable, only by those who have experience in these matters, and they observe a fitting sobriety in this regard. Others have, at times, ridiculously abused these terms, even to speaking of superseraphic superelevation, of "confrictio deifica," of the abyss of cordial exinanition, and so on, and using other terms which remind one of vain sentimentality and sometimes of mystical sensualism

MYSTICAL HYPERBOLE

In a study of the hyperbolical terms used by the great mystics, it should be pointed out that they did not use these terms with the meaning given them by agnostics. For example, when the mystics say, as Dionysius does, that God in His Deity or His inner life is above being, unity, the true, the good, intelligence, and love, they do not mean that God is unknowable, but that His Deity or His intimate life contains in an eminent manner the divine perfections according to an ineffable, superior mode, which permits these perfections to be mutually identified without destroying each other.

The mystics mean that the Deity, which can be participated in only supernaturally by sanctifying grace, is superior to the absolute perfections that it contains formally and eminently. These perfections, such as being, life, intelligence, can be shared in naturally and are, in fact, participated in by stones, plants, and the human soul. The Deity thus appears as the inaccessible

light superior to every name.

Likewise when the mystics speak hyperbolically of the nothingness of the creature, they mean only that the creature of itself is nothing, and that, although it actually exists through the creative act, it is, in comparison with God, lower and poorer than words can express. All these excessively lengthy circumlocutions are summed up in the more expressive term: the nothingness of the creature.

This legitimate hyperbole is already found in Scripture, as St. Thomas points out in reference to the expression of Isaias: "Therefore is the wrath of God kindled against His people, and He hath stretched out His hand upon them and struck them: and the mountains were troubled."¹¹⁶² In Scripture, says St. Thomas, hyperbole exceeds not the truth, but the judgment of men, in this sense that God is greater than one can believe, and the punishments that He announces to the wicked transcend what one can imagine. In profane writings, hyperbole is a rhetorical figure which augments excessively the measure of things in order to produce a more vivid impression on the mind of the reader: for example, to indicate a very tall man, the word giant is used. Thus human poetry uses hyperbole because of the smallness of human things which it wishes to magnify, whereas the divine poetry of the prophets, of the Psalmist, and that of the great mystics makes use of metaphor and hyperbole because of the infinite elevation of divine things, which it could not otherwise express.¹¹⁶³ Hence there is neither error nor formal exaggeration in scriptural hyperbole, nor in that of the great mystics. The exaggeration is only material, for example, when one speaks of the nothingness of the creature, for thereby the author wishes to convey something that is very true, namely, that in comparison with God, the creature is more poor and deficient than can be expressed; and by contrast God is far more perfect than words can tell.

Hyperbole of the same type is found in these words of Christ: "If thy right eye scandalize thee, pluck it out and cast it from thee.... If thy right hand scandalize thee, cut it off."¹¹⁶⁴ It is not a question here of mutilation; Christ uses a vivid expression to point out the gravity of the danger He is speaking of and the urgent necessity of defending oneself against it. Likewise St. Paul, in speaking of the advantages of Judaism, says: "I count all things to be but loss for the excellent knowledge of Jesus Christ, my Lord; for whom I have suffered the loss of all things and count them but as dung, that I may gain Christ."¹¹⁶⁵

Blessed Angela of Foligno is fond of mystical hyperbole and antithesis when she speaks of the great darkness and of the inner life of God, which is above the perfections of intelligence and love, which are identified in it without disappearing. She writes: "I see nothing and I see all; certitude is obtained in the darkness;"¹¹⁶⁶ that is, I see nothing determinate, but I see all the divine perfections united, fused in an ineffable manner in the eminence of the Deity. What she says in this mystical outburst, Cajetan says in abstract form in the loftiest parts of his commentary on St. Thomas' *Treatise on the Trinity*.¹¹⁶⁷

St. John of the Cross likes to use mystical hyperbole also in explaining his doctrine, for example, in *The Ascent of Mount Carmel*: "All things in heaven and earth are nothing in comparison with God. 'I beheld the earth,' saith He, 'and lo, it was void and a thing of nothing, and the heavens, and there was no light in them' (Jer. 4: 23)' The earth, 'void and nothing,' signifies that the earth and all it contains are nothing, and the heavens without light, that all the lights of heaven, in comparison with God, are perfect darkness. Thus all created things, with the affections bestowed upon them, are nothing, because they are a hindrance, and the privation of our transformation in God."¹¹⁶⁸

To judge by the engraving which serves as a frontispiece to *The Ascent of Mount Carmel*, the author seems to demand excessive abnegation. On the narrow path of perfection, he wrote: "Nothing, nothing, nothing, nothing"; but if he demands so much, it is because he wishes to lead souls to great heights by the most direct route. Above, he wrote: "Since I wish nothing through self-love, all is given to me, without my going in search of it." He explains this statement in the following manner in *The Ascent*: "He has greater joy and comfort in creatures if he detaches himself from them; and he can have no joy in them if he considers them as his own. He acquires also in this detachment from creatures a clear comprehension of them, so as to understand perfectly the truths that relate to them, both naturally and supernaturally. For this reason his joy in them is widely different from his who is attached to them, and far nobler. The former rejoices in their truth, the latter in their deceptiveness; the former in their best, and the latter in their worst, conditions; the former in their substantial worth, and the latter in their seeming and accidental nature, through his senses only. For sense cannot grasp or comprehend more than the accidents, but the mind, purified from the clouds and species of the accidents, penetrates to the interior truth of things, for that is its proper object.... The negation and purgation of this joy leaves the judgment clear as the sky when the mists are scattered. The former, therefore, has joy in all things, but his joy is not dependent upon them, neither does it arise from their being his own; and the latter, in so far as he regards them as his own, loses in general all joy whatever."¹¹⁶⁹ This is indeed what St. Paul says: "Having nothing, and possessing all things."¹¹⁷⁰ St. Francis of Assisi enjoyed the landscapes of Umbria incomparably more than the proprietors of those lands, who were busy making them materially fructify to the greatest possible extent.

The mystics themselves, it is evident, explain the hyperbole and antithesis to which they have recourse in order to draw us from our somnolence and to try to make us glimpse the elevation of divine things and the value of the one thing necessary.

A comparison of their language with that of theologians will be profitable that we may see how they clarify each other.

Each of these two terminologies has its merits. For the theologian's study, his more abstract and precise language, which is limited to essential terms, is preferable. But to lead souls effectively to generous abnegation and union with God, the terminology of the mystics is more appropriate because it is more vivid, more alluring, and also more brief, and, in a concrete manner, more comprehensive. These qualities spring from the fact that it expresses not only abstract concepts, but concepts that have been lived, and an ardent love of God; consequently it avoids many circumlocutions and speculative distinctions which would arrest the impulse of the love of God. It leads the soul to seek God Himself beyond the formulas of faith and through them. It reminds us that, if the truth of our judgments is in our mind, the good toward which the will tends is outside our mind, in God Himself.¹¹⁷¹ It leads also to the thought that what is unknowable and ineffable in God is sovereignly good and can be ardently loved without being really known. It is inspired by the thought which St. Thomas formulates as follows: "(In this life) the love of God is better than the knowledge of God,"¹¹⁷² for by knowledge we in a way draw God to ourselves by imposing on Him, so to speak, the limit of our ideas, whereas love draws us and lifts us toward God.

The distinction between these two terminologies appears, for example, in a comparison of our Savior's words with a theological commentary on them. In verse twenty-five, chapter twelve of St. John's Gospel, Christ says briefly, vividly, and concretely: 'He that loveth his life shall lose it; and he that hateth his life in this world, keepeth it unto life eternal' That is: he who loves his life in an inordinate manner, for example, by refusing to undergo martyrdom rather than to deny his faith, will lose his soul; whereas he who in this world has a holy hatred of his life, for example, by undergoing martyrdom for the Gospel's sake, will save his soul for eternal life.

But if we attempt a theological explanation of these highly vivid words of Christ, we will construe them in the following abstract manner: he who loves his life with a love contrary to charity will lose it. He will not lose it, however, because he loves his life with a natural love, which is distinct from charity without being contrary to it; and with even greater reason, if he loves it with a love which is included in charity itself. It is St. Thomas¹¹⁷³ who thus distinguishes these three very different ways of loving one's life: the first, contrary to charity; the second, distinct from charity; the third, included in charity, when we wish the life of grace and that of heaven in order to glorify God. These distinctions are indispensable to the theologian; they are those of the speculative intellect which analyzes, whereas Christ's words lead immediately to love and to the generosity of love.

Likewise, the mystics speak briefly of the nothingness of the creature in order to express what theologians would state in the five following propositions: (1) the creature of itself is nothing, for it was created *ex nihilo*; (2) compared to God, the already existing creature is nothing, for there is no more perfection after creation, no more being than before, although there are now more beings; (3) by its essential defectibility the creature tends to nothingness and sin; (4) sin is less than nothingness itself, for it is not only the negation, but the privation of a good; it is a disorder and an offense against God; (5) the creature is nothing in our affection if we love it without subordinating it to God, for thus it turns us away from Him.

These five propositions, which are necessary for the abstract study of truth, are summed up in the vivid expression of spiritual writers: the nothingness of the creature. This hyperbolical expression is not false; it would be so only if the word "nothingness" were taken in its literal meaning. Then it would signify that God created nothing outside of Himself and, consequently, one could not speak at all of creatures. All that we have said is clear, and does not greatly need explanation.

We may exemplify the distinction between the two terminologies by comparing the theological treatise on charity with its multiple questions; articles, objections, answers, and distinctions, with what *The Imitation* says about the marvelous effects of divine love: "Nothing is sweeter than love, nothing stronger, nothing higher, nothing wider, nothing more pleasant, nothing fuller or better in heaven or in earth: for love is born of God, and cannot rest but in God, above all created things. The lover flieth, runneth, and rejoiceth; he is free and cannot be restrained.... Love watcheth, and sleeping slumbereth not. When weary it is not tired; when straightened is not constrained; when frightened is not disturbed; but like a vivid flame and a burning torch, it mounteth upwards and securely passeth through all.... He that loveth must willingly embrace all that is hard and bitter for the sake of his Beloved, and never suffer himself to be turned-away from Him by any contrary occurrences whatsoever."¹¹⁷⁴

WHICH OF THESE TWO TERMINOLOGIES IS THE LOFTIER?

Which of these two terminologies is the loftier depends on the principle formulated by Aristotle and often recalled by St. Thomas: "The terms of language are the signs of our ideas, and our ideas are the similitude of realities."¹¹⁷⁵ The more elevated terminology is, therefore, the one that expresses a loftier thought. Now infused contemplation, in spite of its obscurity and lack of precision, is loftier than theological speculation. Therefore the language of the mystics, which expresses this contemplation, is more elevated than that of theologians. Moreover, that great mystics may acquaint us with their intimate experiences, it is fitting that they should be great poets, like St. John of the Cross or Ruysbroeck; it is not necessary for the theologian to be a poet.

However, if the language of the mystics is in itself more lofty, because it expresses a higher knowledge, it translates this knowledge less exactly than the language of theologians expresses their thought. But we see that this point of view is secondary, if we remember what St. Thomas, following Aristotle, says in the *Contra Gentes*: “Although we know very little about the loftiest things, the little that we do know about them is more loved and desired than the most exact knowledge that can be had of inferior things.”¹¹⁷⁶ Thus a probable or congruous argument on the mystery of the Trinity is, by reason of the dignity of its object, worth more than all the geometric demonstrations of Euclid.¹¹⁷⁷

What we have just said is confirmed by the fact that Christ’s manner of speaking in Scripture is most lofty; now, the language of spiritual writers more closely resembles it than does scholastic terminology. For example, without feeling that they need to explain them, spiritual writers repeat Christ’s words: “If thou didst know the gift of God,... thou perhaps wouldst have asked of Him, and He would have given thee living water... springing up into life everlasting.”¹¹⁷⁸ “If any man thirst, let him come to Me, and drink.... Out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water.”¹¹⁷⁹ Theologians, on the other hand, would offer the following explanation of these words: sanctifying grace, metaphorically expressed by the living water, is an infused habit, received in the essence of the soul, from which spring in our faculties the infused virtues and the gifts of the Holy Ghost, all ordered to eternal life. This theological commentary is in relation to the words of our Savior what the polygon inscribed within a circumference is in relation to it. The commentary shows the multiple wealth of the divine utterance, but in its simplicity this saying is superior to the commentary.

Consequently these two terminologies clarify each other, like the doctrine of St. Thomas and that of St. John of the Cross, like acquired wisdom, according to the perfect use of reason enlightened by faith, and infused wisdom or the gift of wisdom.¹¹⁸⁰

The terminology of the Gospel, such as it is kept by spiritual writers, preserves the spirit of faith and love of God, that is, the very spirit of the theological doctrine relative to the majesty of God and the inferiority of the creature. From this point of view, an antimystical scholastic theologian would be a bad theologian.

On the other hand, scholastic terminology is necessary, if not for the individual interior life of the faithful, at least for the doctrinal exposition of revealed truth in opposition to the inexact statements that disfigure it. Without the suitability and precision of theological terms, it is easy to fall into these errors; for example, one exaggerates the congruous reasons for the mysteries of faith and proposes them as if they were demonstrative, or indeed one exaggerates the natural desire to see God to such an extent as to make of it, with Baius, an efficacious natural desire, with the result that grace would not be a gratuitous gift, but a favor due to our nature. For this reason the great mystics, like St. Teresa and St. John of the Cross, highly esteemed great theologians, whereas false mystics, like Molinos, gave them no importance whatever.

Therefore the priest who directs souls should know these two terminologies and be able to explain the one by the other. No one can know the true meaning of the language of spiritual writers if he is unable to explain it theologically; and, on the other hand, no one can know the sublimity of theology if he is ignorant of its relations to mysticism.

The Entrance into the Illuminative Way

Scripture often recalls, even to those who are in the state of grace, the necessity of a more profound conversion toward God. Our Lord Himself spoke to His apostles, who had been following Him from the beginning of His ministry, about the necessity of becoming converted. St. Mark relates, in fact, that when Christ made His last journey into Galilee with His apostles, on reaching Capharnaum He asked them: "What did you treat of in the way? But they held their peace," says the Evangelist, "for in the way they had disputed among themselves which of them should be the greatest."¹¹⁸¹ And in St. Matthew, where the same occurrence is recounted, we read: "And Jesus, calling unto Him a little child, set him in the midst of them, and said: Amen I say to you, unless you be converted and become as little children, you shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven."¹¹⁸² Christ was speaking here to the apostles, who had already taken part in His ministry, who would receive Communion at the Last Supper, three of whom had accompanied Him to Thabor; they were in the state of grace, and yet He spoke to them of the necessity of being converted in order to enter profoundly into the kingdom or the divine intimacy. To this end He particularly recommended to them the humility of the child of God, who is conscious of his indigence, his weakness, his dependence on the heavenly Father.

Christ even spoke especially to Peter about his second conversion, just before the Passion, when once again, as St. Luke tells us: "There was also a strife amongst them [the apostles], which of them should seem to be the greater. And He said to them... But he that is the greater among you, let him become as the younger; and he that is the leader, as he that serveth."¹¹⁸³ And to Peter He added: "Simon, Simon, behold Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat: but I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and thou, being once converted, confirm thy brethren."¹¹⁸⁴ On this occasion, Christ is speaking of Peter's second conversion; the first had taken place when he left his work as a fisherman to follow Jesus.

The liturgy often refers to the second conversion, particularly when it recalls these words of St. Paul: "You have heard Him, and have been taught in Him, as the truth is in Jesus: to put off, according to former conversation, the old man, who is corrupted according to the desire of error, and be renewed in the spirit of your mind: and put on the new man, who according to God is created in justice and holiness of truth."¹¹⁸⁵ This spiritual renewal presupposes a first conversion. The Apostle of the Gentiles speaks of it again in the Epistle to the Colossians: "Lie not one to another: stripping yourselves of the old man with his deeds, and putting on the new, him who is renewed unto knowledge, according to the image of Him that created him.... But above all these things have charity, which is the bond of perfection."¹¹⁸⁶

When the liturgy recalls these words during Advent and at the beginning of Lent, it addresses not only souls in the state of mortal sin that are in need of conversion from evil to good, but also many Christians already in the state of grace who are still very imperfect and have to be converted from a relatively mediocre to a fervent Christian life. On Ash Wednesday it recalls to them Joel's words: "Now, therefore, saith the Lord: Be converted to Me with all your heart, in fasting and in weeping and in mourning. And rend your hearts, and not your garments, and turn to the Lord your God; for He is gracious and merciful, patient and rich in mercy, and ready to repent of the evil."¹¹⁸⁷ These words are so much the better understood in proportion as the soul that hears them is more advanced and, although in the state of grace for many years, feels the need of a more profound conversion, the necessity of turning the depths of its will more completely toward God. The laborer who has plowed a furrow goes over it a second time to force the plow deeper and turn over the earth which must nourish the wheat.

From this point of view, which is admitted by all, the best spiritual writers have spoken of the necessity of a second conversion to enter truly on the illuminative way of proficients.

Among modern authors, Father Louis Lallemant, S.J. (d. 1680), insists on this point in his beautiful book, *La Doctrine Spirituelle*. Before him St. Benedict,¹¹⁸⁸ St. Catherine of Siena, Blessed Henry Suso, and Tauler spoke of it at considerable length; but it is principally St. John of the Cross who has treated of this second conversion, which he calls the passive purification of the senses, and which in his opinion marks the entrance into the illuminative way.

We shall set forth the doctrine of these authors, recalling first of all what Father Lallemant says on this subject, since his teaching is easier to understand because it is nearer to our own times. We shall then better grasp what St. Catherine of Siena and Tauler teach, and finally what St. John of the Cross affirms with originality and profundity.

We shall now see what the author of *La Doctrine Spirituelle* says:

of the fact of this second conversion in the lives of the saints,
of its necessity and fruits.

Father Lallemand states on this subject: “Two conversions ordinarily occur in the majority of the saints and in religious who become perfect: one, by which they devote themselves to the service of God; the other, by which they give themselves entirely to perfection. We see this fact in the lives of the apostles when Christ called them and when he sent the Holy Ghost upon them;¹¹⁸⁹ in St. Teresa, and in her confessor, Father Alvarez, and in several others.¹¹⁹⁰ The second conversion does not occur in all religious, because of their negligence. The time of this conversion in our lives¹¹⁹¹ is commonly the third year of novitiate. Let us, therefore, take fresh courage now and not spare ourselves in the service of God, because it will never be harder for us than it is at present.¹¹⁹² As time goes on, this way will gradually be rendered less rough, and the difficulties will be smoothed away, because the more pure our hearts become, the more abundantly we shall receive graces.”¹¹⁹³ At this juncture a decisive step must be taken.¹¹⁹⁴

What Father Lallemand says here may be completed by examining the lives of many servants of God. There is a painful period, difficult to traverse, which is often set forth, in the lives of the saints and in the processes of beatification, under the title of “Interior Sufferings”; this period marks the entrance into a higher spiritual life. We believe also that notable light would be thrown on the lives of the saints and also on the causes of beatification, if it were more explicitly noted that this period corresponds to what St. John of the Cross calls the passive night of the senses, and that another period, similar to it in certain respects, occurs later. According to this doctor of the Church, the latter corresponds to the passive night of the spirit.

This observation is of a nature to throw light on the most obscure moments in the lives of the servants of God. If, in reality, between the two particularly difficult periods we have just spoken of, the heroic degree of the virtues can already be established, and if it is even more clearly proved after the second of these two periods, it is a sign that the servant of God has indeed successfully passed through both of these periods. It is likewise a sign that he must have had a great spirit of faith, of trust in God in order to surmount the difficulties found therein. Thus these two obscure periods, or to use the expression of St. John of the Cross, these two nights, one of which marks the entrance into the illuminative way of proficients, the other into the unitive way of the perfect, far from being an objection against the sanctity of a soul, serve rather to bring it out more clearly. Great merit is, in fact, necessary to traverse them well, so as not to fall back at this time and to come forth truly fortified by these two trials. The lives of the saints are greatly illumined in the light of these principles.

THE NECESSITY OF THE SECOND CONVERSION

Not only is this second conversion a fact which is verified in the lives of the servants of God; its necessity is manifest because of the inordinate self-love that still remains in beginners after months and years of labor. Of the necessity of the second conversion, Father Lallemand says: “The reason why some reach perfection only very late or not at all is because they follow only nature and human sense in practically everything. They pay little or no heed to the Holy Ghost, whose appropriate work is to enlighten, to direct, to warm.

“The majority of religious, even of good and virtuous ones, follow in their private conduct and in their direction of others only reason and good sense, in which a number among them excel. This rule is good, but it does not suffice for Christian perfection.¹¹⁹⁵

“Such people ordinarily direct their lives by the common feeling of those with whom they live, and as the latter are imperfect, although their lives are not disorderly, they will never reach the sublime ways of the spirit, because the number of the perfect is very small. They live like the ordinary run of people, and their manner of governing others is imperfect.

“The Holy Ghost waits some time for them to enter into their interior and, seeing there the operations of grace and those of nature, to be disposed to follow His direction; but if they misuse the time and favor which He offers them, He finally abandons them to themselves and leaves them in their interior darkness and ignorance, which they preferred and in which they live thereafter amid great dangers for their salvation.”¹¹⁹⁶

The same author, who writes for religious, says: “The salvation of a religious is inseparably linked to his perfection, so that if he abandons care for his spiritual advancement, he gradually approaches ruin and loss. If he does not come to this pass, it is because God, wishing to save him, mercifully comes to his assistance before his fall. All the masters of the spiritual life agree on this maxim: He who does not advance, falls back. But it sometimes happens, because retrogression takes place imperceptibly, that a few who have already made some progress allow a considerable period to elapse before they realize that they are falling back.”¹¹⁹⁷

The necessity of a second conversion arises from all that remains in us of often unconscious egoism which mingles in the greater number of our acts. In a number of people this necessity comes from their unwillingness to be considered naive and their failure to recognize sufficiently the naivete of a superior simplicity which should grow in them. As a result, they become less simple and true with God, their superiors, and themselves. They lose sight practically of the grandeur of the theological virtues, of the importance of humility; then they no longer understand Christ’s words: “Unless you be converted, and become as

little children, you shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.” Under the pretext of prudence, they begin to consider the little aspects of great things and to see less and less the great aspect of the daily duties of Christian life and the value of fidelity in little things. They forget that the day is composed of hours and the hour of minutes. They neglect a number of their obligations and gradually, in place of the radical simplicity of a gaze that was already lofty, a simplicity which should become that of contemplation, they find themselves in the quasi-learned complexity of a waning knowledge.

On this subject Father Lallemant says: “In religion (itself) there is a little world, the component parts of which are the esteem of human talents, of important employments, offices, and positions, the love and search for glory and applause, for rest and a calm life. These are the things the demon uses as a puppet show to amuse and deceive us. He sets it all in motion before our eyes in such a way that we dwell on it and let ourselves be seduced, preferring vain appearances to true and solid goods.”¹¹⁹⁸

Human talents are indeed often preferred to the great supernatural virtues. The same author adds: “Only prayer can protect us from this delusion. Prayer it is that teaches us to judge of things in a holy manner, to look at them in the light of truth, which dissipates their false splendor and their spurious charms.”

Elsewhere he says: “We commit more than a hundred acts of pride in a day without, so to speak, being aware of it.”¹¹⁹⁹ The ruin of souls results from the multiplication of venial sins, which causes the diminution of divine lights or inspirations.¹²⁰⁰ Nor is it sufficient to direct our attention toward God as an afterthought, if our act remains entirely natural and our heart is not truly offered to God. A superficial oblation of self does not suffice; there must be a genuine new conversion, a turning of the heart toward God.¹²⁰¹

The fruits of this second conversion are pointed out by the same author in the course of advice to preachers: “People kill themselves dying to produce fine sermons, and yet they reap scarcely any fruit. What is the reason? It is because preaching is just as much a supernatural function as the salvation of souls to which it is directed, and the instrument must be proportioned to the end.... The majority of preachers have sufficient learning, but they have not enough devotion or sanctity.

“The true means of acquiring the science of the saints... is to have recourse not so much to books as to interior humility, purity of heart, recollection, and prayer.... When a soul has attained to entire purity of heart, God Himself instructs it, at times by the unction of spiritual consolations and tastes, at other times by gentle and affectionate lights, which teach it better how to speak to the hearts of its auditors than study and other human means can.... But we cannot get rid of our own sufficiency, nor abandon ourselves to God.

“An interior man will make more impression on hearts by a single word that is animated by the spirit of God than another by an entire discourse costing him much work and in which he exhausted all the power of his reasoning.”¹²⁰² Such are the fruits of the second conversion. The author of *The Imitation* often speaks of them, especially when he describes the fervor with which we should amend our lives. He says: “A diligent and zealous person will make greater progress, though he have more passions, than another who is well regulated, but less fervent in the pursuit of virtues.... Study, likewise, especially to guard against and to get the better of such things as oftenest displease thee in others.... As thine eye observeth others, so again thou art also observed by others.... But if thou give thyself to fervor, thou shalt find great peace; and thou shalt feel thy labor light, through the grace of God, and for the love of virtue.”¹²⁰³

Thus, intimate conversation with God, which is the basis of the interior life, will gradually take the place of conversation with ourselves.¹²⁰⁴

The Second Conversion According to Several Spiritual Writers

We discussed in the preceding chapter the second conversion according to the teaching of Father Louis Lallemant, S.J., one of the best spiritual writers of the seventeenth century. In the fourteenth century, we find the same teaching under another form in the writings of St. Catherine of Siena (d. 1380), Tauler (d. 1361), and Blessed Henry Suso (d. 1366), all of whom belong to the family of St. Dominic.

THE SECOND CONVERSION IN *THE DIALOGUE* OF ST. CATHERINE OF SIENA

St. Catherine of Siena discusses the second conversion in chapters 60 and 63 of her *Dialogue*, in reference to imperfect love of God and neighbor, and cites as an example the second conversion of Peter during the Passion. We read in chapter 60: “Some there are who have become faithful servants, serving Me with fidelity without servile fear of punishment, but rather with love. This very love, however, if they serve Me with a view to their own profit, or the delight and pleasure which they find in Me, is imperfect. Dost thou know what proves the imperfection of this love? The withdrawal of the consolations which they found in Me, and the insufficiency and short duration of their love for their neighbor, which grows weak by degrees, and oftentimes disappears. Toward Me their love grows weak when, on occasion, in order to exercise them in virtue and raise them above their imperfection, I withdraw from their minds My consolation and allow them to fall into battles and perplexities. This I do so that, coming to perfect self-knowledge, they may know that of themselves they are nothing and have no grace, and, accordingly in time of battle fly to Me as their benefactor, seeking Me alone, with true humility, for which purpose I treat them thus, withdrawing from them consolation indeed, but not grace. At such a time these weak ones of whom I speak relax their energy, impatiently turning backward, and so sometimes abandon, under color of virtue, many of their exercises, saying to themselves: This labor does not profit me. All this they do, because they feel themselves deprived of mental consolation. Such a soul acts imperfectly, for she has not yet unwound the bandage of spiritual self-love, for had she unwound it, she would see that, in truth, everything proceeds from Me, that no leaf of a tree falls to the ground without My providence, and that what I give and promise to My creatures, I give and promise to them for their sanctification, which is the good and the end for which I created them.”

In imperfect or mercenary love of God and neighbor, the soul, therefore, almost unconsciously seeks itself. It must “tear out the root of spiritual self-love.” As *The Dialogue* states: “It was with this imperfect love that St. Peter loved the sweet and good Jesus, My only-begotten Son, enjoying most pleasantly His sweet conversation, but, when the time of trouble came, he failed, and so disgraceful was his fall, that not only could he not bear any pain him self, but his terror of the very approach of pain caused him to fall, and deny the Lord, with the words, ‘I have never known Him.’”

In chapter 63 of *The Dialogue*, the saint says, in speaking of the passage from mercenary to filial love: “Every perfection and every virtue proceeds from charity, and charity is nourished by humility, which results from the knowledge and holy hatred of self, that is, sensuality... To arrive thereat... a man must exercise himself in the extirpation of his perverse self-will, both spiritual and temporal, hiding himself in his own house, as did Peter, who, after the sin of denying My Son, began to weep. Yet his lamentations were imperfect, and remained so until after the forty days, that is, until after the Ascension. But when My Truth returned, to Me in His humanity, Peter and the others concealed themselves in the house awaiting the coming of the Holy Spirit, which My Truth had promised them. They remained barred in from fear, because the soul always fears until she arrives at true love. But when they had persevered in fasting and in humble and continual prayer, until they had received the abundance of the Holy Spirit, they lost their fear, and followed and preached Christ crucified.”

St. Catherine of Siena shows in this passage that the imperfect soul which loves the Lord with a love that is still mercenary, ought to follow Peter’s example after his denial of Christ. Not infrequently at this time Providence permits us also to fall into some visible fault to humiliate us and oblige us to enter into ourselves, as Peter did, when immediately after his fall, seeing that Jesus looked at him, he “wept bitterly.”¹²⁰⁵

In connection with Peter’s second conversion, we should recall that St. Thomas teaches¹²⁰⁶ that even after a serious sin, if a man has a truly fervent contrition proportionate to the degree of grace lost, he recovers this degree of grace; he may even receive a higher degree if he has a still more fervent contrition. He is, therefore, not obliged to recommence his ascent from the very beginning, but continues it, taking it up again at the point he had reached when he fell. A mountain climber who stumbles halfway up, rises immediately, and continues the ascent. The same is true in the spiritual order. Everything leads us to think that

by the fervor of his repentance Peter not only recovered the degree of grace that he had lost, but was raised to a higher degree of the supernatural life. The Lord permitted this fall only to cure him of his presumption so that he might become more humble and thereafter place his confidence, not in himself, but in God. Thus, the humiliated Peter on his knees weeping over his sin is greater than the Peter on Thabor, who did not as yet sufficiently know his frailty.

The second conversion may also take place, though we have no grave sin to expiate, for example, at a time when we are suffering from an injustice, or a calumny, which, under divine grace, awakens in us not sentiments of vengeance, but hunger and thirst for the justice of God. In such a case, the generous forgiving of a grave injury sometimes draws down on the soul of the one who pardons, a great grace, which makes him enter a higher region of the spiritual life. The soul then receives a new insight into divine things and an impulse which it did not know before. David received such a grace when he pardoned Semei who had outraged and cursed him, while throwing stones at him.¹²⁰⁷

A more profound insight into the life of the soul may originate also on the occasion of the death of a dear one, or of a disaster, or of a great rebuff, when anything occurs which is of a nature to reveal the vanity of earthly things and by contrast the importance of the one thing necessary, union with God, the prelude of the life of heaven.

In her *Dialogue* St. Catherine also speaks often of the necessity of leaving the imperfect state in which a person serves God more or less through interest and for his own satisfaction, and in which he wishes to go to God the Father without passing through Jesus crucified.¹²⁰⁸ To leave this imperfect state, the soul which still seeks itself must be converted that it may cease to seek itself and may truly go in search of God by the way of abnegation, which is that of profound peace.

THE SECOND CONVERSION ACCORDING TO BLESSED HENRY SUSO AND TAULER

The works of Blessed Henry Suso contain a number of instructions relative to the second conversion. He himself experienced this conversion after a few years of religious life, during which he had slipped into some negligences. Particular attention ought to be given to what he says about the necessity of a more interior and deep Christian life in religious who give themselves most exclusively to study, and in others who are chiefly attentive to exterior observances and austerities. In the divine light he saw “these two classes of persons circling about the Savior’s cross, without being able to reach Him,”¹²⁰⁹ because both groups sought themselves, either in study or in exterior observances, and because they judged each other without charity. He understood then that he should remain in complete self-abnegation, ready to accept all that God might will, and to accept it with love, at the same time practicing great fraternal charity.¹²¹⁰

Tauler, who, as Bossuet says, is “one of the most solid and most correct of the mystics,”¹²¹¹ speaks of the second conversion especially in two of his sermons, that for the second Sunday of Lent, and the one for the Monday before Palm Sunday.¹²¹²

In the sermon for the second Sunday of Lent, Tauler points out those who need the second conversion; they are those who still more or less resemble the scribes and Pharisees. We may summarize his teaching as follows:

The scribes, he says, were wise men who made much of their learning, whereas the Pharisees, who were strongly attached to their practices and observances, highly esteemed their own piety.¹²¹³ We recognize in these two classes the two most harmful evil inclinations that can be found among pious people.... Nothing good comes from either of these dispositions. Nevertheless, rare are they who are not somewhat retained in one or the other of these evil inclinations or even in both of them at the same time; but some are much more held than others.

By the scribes we must understand intellectual men who value everything according to the standard of their reason or sensibility. They pass on to their reason what their senses have furnished them, and thus they come to understand great things. They glory in this knowledge and speak eloquently, but the depths of their souls, whence the truth should come, remain empty and desolate.

The Pharisees, on the other hand, are pious people who have a good opinion of themselves, think they amount to something, hold firmly to their observances and their practices, believe there is nothing beyond these, and aspire to esteem and consideration because of these practices. They condemn those who do not see things as they do (even if their lives are in no way seriously reprehensible).

(Tauler certainly does not believe that these last are in the illuminative way.)

Let everyone, he adds, guard against these Pharisaical ways in the depths of his soul, and be watchful that no false sanctity hide there.

In this connection we should recall what the Gospel tells us about the prayer of the Pharisee and the publican, a parable which shows the necessity of a more profound conversion.

What occurs at the beginning of the second conversion? God begins to pursue the soul, and it likewise seeks God, not, however, without a struggle against the inclinations of the exterior man and without anxiety. This state is manifested by a keen desire for God and for perfection, and also by what St. Paul calls the struggle of the spirit against the flesh or the inferior part of man.¹²¹⁴ From this struggle originates anxiety or even a certain anguish; the soul asks itself if it will reach the end so keenly desired.

Tauler gives a good description of this state, which St. John of the Cross later on calls the passive purification of the senses, in which there is a beginning of infused contemplation. In the sermon for the second Sunday of Lent, the old Dominican master

declares: "From this pursuit of God (and of the soul who seek each other) keen anguish results. When a man is plunged into this anxiety and becomes aware of this pursuit of God in his soul, it is then without doubt that Jesus comes and enters into him. But when one does not feel this pursuit or experience this anguish, Jesus does not come.

"Of all those who do not let themselves be caught by this pursuit and this anguish, none ever turns out well; they remain what they are, they do not enter into themselves, and consequently they know nothing of what is taking place in them."

These last words show that in Tauler's opinion this passive purification is indeed in the normal way of sanctity and not an essentially extraordinary grace like revelations, visions, and the stigmata. It is a purification that must be undergone on earth while meriting, or in purgatory without meriting, in order to reach perfect purity of soul, without which one cannot enter heaven. If a man must labor to obtain a doctor's degree in theology or law, he must also toil to reach true perfection.

Though some people stricken with neurasthenia erroneously believe they are in this state, it often happens that interior souls who are truly in this anxiety and who seek light from a confessor, obtain only this answer: "Do not trouble yourself; those are only scruples. Remain in peace; the passive purifications that certain books speak of are very rare and extraordinary." After this answer, the soul is no more illuminated than before and has the impression of not having been understood.

What Tauler speaks of in the above passage is truly in the normal way of sanctity or of the full perfection of Christian life. God appears here as the Hunter in pursuit of souls for their greatest good.

What should the soul do that is thus pursued by the Savior? Tauler answers: "In truth, it should do what the woman of Canaan did: go to Jesus and cry in a loud voice, that is, with an ardent desire: 'Lord, Son of David, have pity on me!'

"Ah! my children, this divine pursuit, this hunt provokes (in some souls) an appealing cry of immense force; the supplication of the spirit carries thousands of leagues and more (that is, even to the Most High); it is a sigh which comes from a measureless depth. This desire of the soul reaches far beyond nature; it is the Holy Ghost Himself who must utter this sigh in us, as St. Paul says: 'The Spirit Himself asketh for us with unspeakable groanings.'"¹²¹⁵

These words of Tauler show that in his opinion and, as we shall see, later on in that of St. John of the Cross, the soul in this struggle enters on the mystical life through a special inspiration of the Holy Ghost and a beginning of contemplation, in spite of the aridity in which it remains. The Holy Ghost, who dwells in all the just, begins to render His influence manifest.

Tauler points out here that, after this cry of the soul, God treats it at times as Jesus did the woman of Canaan; He acts as if He did not hear or were not willing to grant its prayer. This is the time to insist, as the woman of Canaan did so admirably, under the divine inspiration which pursued her in the midst of obvious rebuffs.

"Ah! my children," says Tauler, "how greatly then should the desire in the depths of the soul become more keen and more urgent.... Even if God refused to give bread, even if He disowned one as His child..., one should answer Him as did the Canaanite: 'Yea Lord; for the whelps also eat of the crumbs that fall from the table of their masters.'

"Ah! my children," adds Tauler, "if one could succeed in thus penetrating the depths of the truth (of our consciences) not by learned commentaries, words, or indeed with the senses, but into the true depth! Then neither God nor any creature could tread on you, crush you, bury you so deeply that you would not plunge yourselves truly much deeper still. Though you should be subjected to affronts, scorn, and rebuffs, you would remain firm in perseverance, you would plunge still deeper, animated by a complete confidence, and you would ever increase your zeal."¹²¹⁶ Ah! yes, my children, everything depends on this; a man who reached this point, would be really successful. These roads, and these alone, lead, in truth, without any intermediary station to God. But to some it seems impossible to reach this degree of limitless annihilation and to remain thus in this depth with perseverance, with entire and veritable assurance, as this poor Canaanite woman did. Consequently Christ answered her: 'O woman! great is thy faith. Be it done to thee as thou wilt.' In truth, this is the answer that will be made to all those who will be found in such dispositions and on this road."

Tauler relates at this point what happened to a young girl who, believing herself far from God, nevertheless abandoned herself entirely to His holy will, no matter what it might bring, and gave herself up wholly for eternity; then, he says, "she was carried very far above every intermediary and completely drawn into the divine abyss."

To show the fruits of the second conversion, the old master adds: "Take the last place, as the Gospel teaches, and you shall be lifted up. But those who exalt themselves will be humbled. Desire only what God has willed from all eternity; accept the place which in His most amiable will He has decided should be yours."¹²¹⁷

"My children, it is by a person's complete renunciation of self and of all that he possesses that he goes to God. One drop of this renunciation, one rill of it,¹²¹⁸ would better prepare a man and lead him nearer to God than if he had stripped himself of all his garments and given them away, than if he had eaten thorns and stones, supposing that nature could bear it. A short moment lived in these dispositions would be more useful for us than forty years following practices of our own choice....

"For long years you go your own little way and you do not advance,... a deplorable condition. Let us, therefore, pray our Lord that we may plunge ourselves so profoundly in God that we may be found in Him. Amen."¹²¹⁹

Such is Tauler's description of the second conversion in which the soul is far more profoundly "turned toward God," like the soil, for example, which, on second plowing, is more deeply turned up that it may become really fruitful.

Tauler treats the same subject in the sermon for the Monday before Palm Sunday¹²²⁰ while explaining the text: “If any man thirst, let him come to Me, and drink.... Out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water.”¹²²¹ In this sermon he describes¹²²² the soul’s thirst for God which arises under the inspiration of the Holy Ghost, at the same time as a sort of disgust for everything created, for everything in it that is inordinate, untrue, and vain. This lively desire for God and this distaste for creatures are accompanied by a struggle against the inordinate inclinations of the sensibility and impatience. This is in reality the state that St. John of the Cross later calls the passive purification of the senses. Tauler describes it with an abundance of metaphors that today seem excessive. He notes that after this trial there is a period of repose and enjoyment.¹²²³ Then he describes the second series of trials by which the unitive way of the perfect begins;¹²²⁴ these trials are those which St. John of the Cross calls the passive night of the spirit.

This teaching, which is approximately the same under varied forms in the works of St. Catherine of Siena, Blessed Henry Suso, and Venerable Tauler, shows that to enter the illuminative way of proficients a person needs what Father Lallemant and several others have rightly called a second conversion. Then the soul begins to understand Christ’s words to the apostles, who were arguing to find out who was the first among them: “Amen I say to you, unless you be converted and become as little children [by simplicity and consciousness of your weakness], you shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.”¹²²⁵ The apostles were already in the state of grace, but they needed a second conversion to enter the intimacy of the kingdom, to penetrate deeply into it, that “the depths of the soul,” which Tauler speaks of so frequently, might no longer contain any egoism or self-love, but belong wholly to God so that God might truly reign in it. Until His reign is established in the generous soul, the Lord pursues it; and, under the divine inspiration, it will also seek Him by an increasingly pure and strong desire, at the same time that it ceases to seek itself. Then its eyes will be opened and it will see that a number of those whom it judged severely are better than it. This work is the divine work par excellence, that of the profound purification of the soul; first of the sensitive part; then of the spiritual part to the end that it may be established in the intimacy of the divine union, the normal prelude of the life of heaven.

The Passive Purification of the Senses and the Entrance into the Illuminative Way

The entrance into the illuminative way, which is the second conversion described by St. Catherine of Siena, Blessed Henry Suso, Tauler, and Father Lallemant, is called by St. John of the Cross the passive purification of the senses or the night of the senses. At this point in our study we must see what St. John of the Cross says about: (1) the necessity of this purification; (2) the way it is produced; (3) the conduct to be observed at this difficult time; (4) the trials which ordinarily accompany the purifying divine action. These points will be the subject of this chapter and the following one.

THE NECESSITY OF THIS PURIFICATION

In *The Dark Night of the Soul*, St. John of the Cross says: “The night of sense is common, and the lot of many: these are the beginners”;¹²²⁶ and he adds farther on, after discussing this trial: “The soul began to set out on the way of the spirit, the way of proficients, which is also called the illuminative way, or the way of infused contemplation, wherein God Himself teaches and refreshes the soul without meditation or any active efforts that itself may deliberately make.”¹²²⁷ Nevertheless the soul must always struggle to remove the obstacles to this grace and to be faithful to it. These two texts are extremely important, for they mark the age of the spiritual life in which the purifying trial we are considering is ordinarily produced.

The necessity of this purification, as the saint shows in the same book,¹²²⁸ arises from the defects of beginners, which may be reduced to three: spiritual pride, spiritual sensuality, and spiritual sloth. St. John of the Cross teaches that remains of the seven capital sins, like so many deviations of the spiritual life, are found even here. And yet the mystical doctor considers only the disorder that results from them in our relations with God; he does not speak of all that taints our dealings with our neighbor and the apostolate which may be under our care.

Spiritual sensuality, with which we are especially concerned here under the name of spiritual gluttony, consists in being immoderately attached to the sensible consolations that God sometimes grants in prayer. The soul seeks these consolations for themselves, forgetting that they are not an end, but a means; it prefers the savor of spiritual things to their purity, and thus seeks itself in the things of God rather than God Himself, as it should. In others, this selfseeking is in the exterior apostolate, in some form or other of activity.

Spiritual sloth comes as a rule then from the fact that, when spiritual gluttony or some other form of selfishness is not satisfied to the desired extent, one falls into impatience and a certain disgust for the work of sanctification as soon as it is a question of advancing by the “narrow way.” The early writers spoke much of this spiritual sloth and of this disgust, which they called *acedia*.¹²²⁹ They even declared that *acedia*, when accentuated, leads to malice, rancor, pusillanimity, discouragement, sluggishness, and dissipation of spirit in regard to forbidden things.¹²³⁰

Spiritual pride manifests itself quite frequently when spiritual gluttony or some other self-seeking is satisfied, when things go as one wishes; then a man boasts of his perfection, judges others severely, sets himself up as a master, while he is still only a poor disciple. This spiritual pride, says St. John of the Cross,¹²³¹ leads beginners to flee masters who do not approve of their spirit; “they even end by bearing them rancor.” They seek a guide favorable to their inclinations, desire to be on intimate terms with him, confess their sins to him in such a way as not to lower themselves in his esteem. As St. John of the Cross says: “They go about palliating their sins, that they may not seem so bad: which is excusing rather than accusing themselves. Sometimes they go to a stranger to confess their sin, that their usual confessor may think that they are not sinners, but good people. And so they always take pleasure in telling him of their goodness.”¹²³²

This spiritual pride leads, as is evident, to a certain pharisaical hypocrisy, which shows that the beginners, whom St. John of the Cross is speaking of, are still very imperfect; they are, therefore, beginners in the sense in which this word is generally understood by spiritual authors.¹²³³ And yet it is of them that St. John of the Cross says here that they need to undergo the passive purification of the senses, which therefore marks clearly the entrance into the illuminative way of proficients, according to the traditional meaning of these terms.

To the defects of spiritual gluttony, spiritual sloth, and spiritual pride, are added many others: curiosity, which decreases love of the truth; sufficiency, which leads us to exaggerate our personal worth, to become irritated when it is not recognized; jealousy and envy, which lead to disparagement, intrigues, and unhappy conflicts, which more or less seriously injure the general good. Likewise in the apostolate, the defect rather frequent at this time is natural eagerness in self-seeking, in making oneself a center, in drawing souls to oneself or to the group to which one belongs instead of leading them to our Lord. Finally,

let trial, a rebuff, a disgrace come, and one is, in consequence, inclined to discouragement, discontent, sulkiness, pusillanimity, which seeks more or less to assume the external appearances of humility. All these defects show the necessity of a profound purification.

Several of these defects may, without doubt, be corrected by exterior mortification and especially by interior mortification which we should impose on ourselves; but such mortification does not suffice to extirpate their roots, which penetrate to the very center of our faculties.¹²³⁴ “The soul, however,” says St. John of the Cross, “cannot be perfectly purified from these imperfections, any more than from the others, until God shall have led it into the passive purgation of the dark night, which I shall speak of immediately. But it is expedient that the soul, so far as it can, should labor, on its own part, to purify and perfect itself, that it may merit from God to be taken under His divine care, and be healed from those imperfections which of itself it cannot remedy. For, after all the efforts of the soul, it cannot by any exertions of its own actively purify itself so as to be in the slightest degree fit for the divine union of perfection in the love of God, if God Himself does not take it into His own hands and purify it in the fire, dark to the soul.”¹²³⁵

In other words, the cross sent by God to purify us must complete the work of mortification which we impose on ourselves. Consequently, as St. Luke relates: “He [Jesus] said to all: If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself [this is the law of mortification or abnegation], and take up his cross daily, and follow Me”;¹²³⁶ *per crucem ad lucem*. This road leads to the light of life, to intimate union with God, the normal prelude of the life of heaven.

HOW THE PASSIVE PURIFICATION OF THE SENSES IS PRODUCED

This state is manifested by three signs which St. John of the Cross describes as follows:

The first is this: when we find no comfort in the things of God, and none also in created things. For when God brings the soul into the dark night in order to wean it from sweetness and to purge the desire of sense, He does not allow it to find sweetness or comfort anywhere. It is then probable, in such a case, that this dryness is not the result of sins or of imperfections recently committed; for if it were, we should feel some inclination or desire for other things than those of God.... But still, inasmuch as this absence of pleasure in the things of heaven and of earth may proceed from bodily indisposition or a melancholy temperament, which frequently causes dissatisfaction with all things, the second test and condition become necessary.

The second test and condition of this purgation are that the memory dwells ordinarily upon God with a painful anxiety and carefulness, the soul thinks it is not serving God, but going backwards, because it is no longer conscious of any sweetness in the things of God.... The true purgative aridity is accompanied in general by a painful anxiety, because the soul thinks that it is not serving God. Though this be occasionally increased by melancholy or other infirmity—so it sometimes happens yet it is not for that reason without its purgative effects on the desires, because the soul is deprived of all sweetness, and its sole anxieties are referred to God. For when mere bodily indisposition is the cause, all that it does is to produce disgust and the ruin of bodily health, without the desire of serving God which belongs to the purgative aridity. In this aridity, though the sensual part of man be greatly depressed, weak and sluggish in good works, by reason of the little satisfaction they furnish, the spirit is, nevertheless, ready and strong.

The cause of this dryness is that God is transferring to the spirit the goods and energies of the senses, which, having no natural fitness for them, become dry, parched up, and empty; for the sensual nature of man is helpless in those things which belong to the spirit simply. Thus the spirit having been tasted, the flesh becomes weak and remiss; but the spirit, having received its proper nourishment, becomes strong, more vigilant and careful than before, lest there should be any negligence in serving God. At first it is not conscious of any spiritual sweetness and delight, but rather of aridities and distaste, because of the novelty of the change. The palate accustomed to sensible sweetness looks for it still. And the spiritual palate is not prepared and purified for so delicious a taste until it shall have been for some time disposed for it in this arid and dark night....¹²³⁷

But when these aridities arise in the purgative way of the sensual appetite the spirit though at first without any sweetness, for the reasons I have given, is conscious of strength and energy to act because of the substantial nature of its interior food, which is the commencement of contemplation, dim and dry to the senses. This contemplation is in general secret, and unknown to him who is admitted into it, and with the aridity and emptiness which it produces in the senses, it makes the soul long for solitude and quiet, without the power of reflecting on anything distinctly, or even desiring to do so.

Now, if they who are in this state knew how to be quiet,... they would have, in this tranquillity, a most delicious sense of this interior food. This food is so delicate that, in general, it eludes our perceptions if we make any special effort to feel it; it is like the air which vanishes when we shut our hands to grasp it. For this is God's way of bringing the soul into this state; the road by which He leads it is so different from the first, that if it will do anything in its own strength, it will hinder rather than aid His work. Therefore, at this time, all that the soul can do of itself ends, as I have said, in disturbing the peace and the work of God in the spirit amid the dryness of sense.¹²³⁸

The third sign we have for ascertaining whether this dryness be the purgation of sense, is inability to meditate and make reflections, and to excite the imagination, as before, notwithstanding all the efforts we may make; for God begins now to communicate Himself, no longer through the channel of sense, as formerly, in consecutive reflections, by which we arranged and divided our knowledge, but in pure spirit, which admits not of successive reflections, and in the act of pure contemplation (to which the special inspiration of the Holy Ghost gives rise in us).¹²³⁹

In regard to this third sign, St. John of the Cross points out that this inability to meditate in a reasoned or discursive manner “does not arise out of any bodily ailment. When it arises from this, the indisposition, which is always changeable, having ceased, the powers of the soul recover their former energies and find their previous satisfactions at once. It is otherwise in the purgation of the appetite, for as soon as we enter upon this, the inability to make our meditations continually grows. It is true that this purgation at first is not continuous in some persons.”¹²⁴⁰

Though this state is manifested by two negative characteristics (sensible aridity and great difficulty in meditating according

to a reasoned manner), evidently the most important element in it is the positive side, that is, initial infused contemplation and the keen desire for God to which it gives rise in us. It must even be admitted that then sensible aridity and the difficulty in meditating come precisely from the fact that grace takes a new, purely spiritual form, superior to the senses and to the discourse of reason, which makes use of the imagination. Here the Lord seems to take from the soul, for He deprives it of sensible consolation, but in reality He bestows a precious gift, nascent contemplation and a love that is more spiritual, pure, and strong. Only, we must keep in mind the saying: "The roots of knowledge are bitter and the fruits sweet"; the same must be said in a higher order of the roots and fruits of contemplation.

THE CAUSE OF THIS STATE

The theological explanation of this state is to be found in four causes. We already know its formal and material causes from the fact that St. John of the Cross tells us that it is a passive purification of the sensibility. Several authors insist on its final cause or end, which is easily discovered, and do not give sufficient attention to its efficient cause.

The passage just quoted from St. John of the Cross indicates the efficient cause. It is, in fact, a special and purifying action of God, from which comes, says the saint, a beginning of infused contemplation. In this contemplation we have the explanation of the keen desire for God experienced by the soul, since man ardently desires only that of which he experimentally knows the charm. This keen desire for God and for perfection is itself the explanation of the fear of falling back (filial fear). Finally, sensible aridity is explained by the fact that the special grace then given is purely spiritual and not sensible; it is a higher form of life. St. John's text explains this state rationally.

On penetrating more deeply into the theological explanation of this state, we observe that in it there is a special inspiration of the Holy Ghost, whose influence then becomes more manifest. Theology teaches that every just soul possesses the seven gifts of the Holy Ghost, which enable it to receive His inspirations with docility and promptness.¹²⁴¹ Here, therefore, the influence of the gifts is quite manifest, especially those gifts of knowledge, filial fear, and fortitude.

The gift of knowledge, in fact, explains the first sign pointed out by St. John of the Cross: "No comfort in the things of God and none also in created things." The gift of knowledge, according to St. Augustine¹²⁴² and St. Thomas,¹²⁴³ makes us know experimentally the emptiness of created things, all that is defectible and deficient in them and in ourselves. Knowledge indeed differs from wisdom inasmuch as it knows things not by their supreme cause, but by their proximate, defectible, and deficient cause. For this reason, according to St. Augustine, the gift of knowledge corresponds to the beatitude of tears. The tears of contrition come actually from the knowledge of the gravity of sin and the nothingness of creatures. The gift of knowledge reminds us of what Ecclesiastes says: "Vanity of vanities,... and all things are vanity," except to love God and to serve Him.¹²⁴⁴ This thought is repeatedly expressed in *The Imitation*¹²⁴⁵ and in the works of great mystics like Ruysbroeck.¹²⁴⁶ Before St. John of the Cross, Ruysbroeck pointed out the relations of the gift of knowledge to the passive purification of the senses, in which the soul knows by experience the emptiness of created things and is led thereby to a keen desire for God.¹²⁴⁷

In the passive purification of the senses which we are speaking of, there is also a manifest influence of the gifts of fear and fortitude, as the second sign given by St. John of the Cross indicates: "The true purgative aridity is accompanied in general by a painful anxiety because the soul thinks that it is not serving God.... For when mere bodily indisposition is the cause, all that it does is to produce disgust and the ruin of bodily health, without the desire of serving God which belongs to the purgative aridity. In this aridity, though the sensual part of man is greatly depressed, weak and sluggish in good works, by reason of the little satisfaction they furnish, the spirit is, nevertheless, ready and strong."¹²⁴⁸

The second sign manifests, therefore, an effect of the gift of fear, of filial fear, not the fear of punishment but that of sin. Filial fear evidently grows with the progress of charity, whereas servile fear, or that of punishment, diminishes.¹²⁴⁹ By the special inspiration of this gift the soul resists the strong temptations against chastity and patience which often accompany the passive purification of the senses. The Christian, who then experiences his indigence, repeats the words of the Psalmist: "Pierce Thou my flesh with Thy fear: for I am afraid of Thy judgments."¹²⁵⁰ According to St. Augustine, the gift of fear corresponds to the beatitude of the poor,¹²⁵¹ of those who do not pose as masters, but who begin to love seriously the humility of the hidden life that they may become more like our Lord. In this poverty they find true riches: "Theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

In the keen desire to serve God which St. John of the Cross speaks of here, a desire that subsists in spite of aridity, temptations, difficulties, there is, at the same time, a manifest effect of the gift of fortitude, corresponding to the fourth beatitude: "Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after justice: for they shall have their fill."¹²⁵² The ardent desire to serve God at no matter what cost is truly this hunger, which the Lord arouses in us. He gives rise to it and He satisfies it; as was said to Daniel: "I am come to show it to thee, because thou art a man of desires."¹²⁵³ The gift of fortitude comes here, in the midst of difficulties and contradictions, to the assistance of the virtues of patience and longanimity; without it spiritual enthusiasm would die away like sensible enthusiasm. This is the time when man must give heed to what *The Imitation* says about the holy way of the cross: "Follow Jesus, and thou shalt go into life everlasting. He is gone before thee, carrying His cross.... If thou

carry the cross willingly, it will carry thee and bring thee to thy desired end.... And sometimes he gaineth such strength through affection to tribulation and adversity, by his love of conformity to the cross of Christ, as not to be willing to be without suffering and affliction.... This is not man's power but the grace of Christ, which doth and can effect such great things in frail flesh, and that what it naturally abhors and flies, even this, through fervor of spirit, it now embraces and loves [i.e., to bear the cross]."¹²⁵⁴

Finally, the third sign which St. John of the Cross speaks of, "the growing difficulty in meditating discursively," shows the influence of the gift of understanding, the source of initial infused contemplation, above reasoning.¹²⁵⁵ In the same chapter of *The Dark Night*,¹²⁵⁶ the saint speaks in exact terms of this "beginning of obscure and arid contemplation" by which God nourishes the soul while purifying it and giving it strength to go beyond the figures, to penetrate the meaning of the formulas of faith that it may reach the superior simplicity which characterizes contemplation.¹²⁵⁷

St. Thomas also speaks clearly on this subject: "The other cleanness of heart is a kind of complement to the sight of God; such is the cleanness of the mind that is purged of phantasms and errors, so as to receive the truths which are proposed to it about God, no longer by way of corporeal phantasms, nor infected with heretical misrepresentations; and this cleanness is the result of the gift of understanding."¹²⁵⁸ Thereby this gift preserves us from possible deviations and makes us go beyond the letter of the Gospel to attain its spirit; it begins to make us penetrate, beyond the formulas of faith, the depths of the mysteries that they express. The formula is no longer a term but a point of departure. This purifying influence of the gift of understanding will be exercised especially in the passive purification of the spirit, but even at this stage it is manifest. Under the special inspiration of the Holy Ghost, the soul now makes an act of penetrating faith, which is called an infused act, for it cannot be produced without this special inspiration.¹²⁵⁹

Thus there begins to be realized what St. Thomas also points out: "But on the part of the soul, before it arrives at this uniformity (of contemplation, symbolized by the uniformity of circular movement, without beginning or end), its twofold lack of uniformity needs to be removed. First, that which arises from the variety of external things... and from the discoursing of reason. This is done by directing all the soul's operations to the simple contemplation of the intelligible truth,"¹²⁶⁰ a process which begins to be realized in the passive purification of the senses. Here, for example, a theologian will see the entire tract on predestination and that on grace reduced to this simple principle: "Since God's love is the cause of goodness in things, no one thing would be better than another if God did not will greater good for one than for another."¹²⁶¹

St. Augustine, in treating of the degrees of the life of the soul,¹²⁶² pointed out that the life of true virtue begins by a purification, which he called "purificationis negotium..., opus tam difficile mundationis animae." Such is, we believe, according to the great masters,¹²⁶³ the explanation of this state or period of transition, which is manifested by the subtraction of sensible graces, but which is in reality the beginning of infused contemplation, the threshold of the mystical life, in which grace is given under a new form, more freed from the senses, that it may spiritualize us, make us attain the vivifying spirit under the letter of the Gospel, and cause us truly to live by it.¹²⁶⁴

NOTE

To distinguish neurasthenia from the passive purifications, we should note that the most frequent symptoms in neurasthenics are the following: almost continual fatigue, even when they have not worked, accompanied by a feeling of prostration, of discouragement; habitual headaches (the sensation of wearing a helmet, a leaden cap; dull pains at the nape of the neck or in the spinal column); insomnia, to such an extent that the neurasthenic wakes up more tired than when he went to bed; difficulty in exercising the intellectual faculties and in maintaining attention; impressionability (intense emotions for very slight causes), which leads the sufferer to believe that he has illnesses that he does not really have; excessive self-analysis even to minute details, continual preoccupation not to become ill.¹²⁶⁵

Neurasthenics are, however, not imaginary invalids; the powerlessness they experience is real, and it would be very imprudent to urge them to disregard their fatigue and work to the limit of their strength. What they lack is not will, but power.

The causes of neurasthenia may be organic like infections, endocrine or liver troubles, pre-paralysis; but often the causes are also psychical: intellectual overloading, moral worries, painful emotions, which constitute too heavy a load for the nervous system. Even in these last cases, where the cause of the disease is mental, the illness itself affects the organism. For this reason neurasthenics must absolutely be made to rest; and they must be progressively led to perform easy tasks proportionate to their strength, and be encouraged.

We should also note that psychoneuroses may be associated with a developed intellectual life and a lofty moral life. Consequently we see, as St. John of the Cross pointed out in speaking of the three signs of the passive night of the senses, that this night may exist simultaneously with melancholia, or neurasthenia as it is called today. But we see also that the passive night is distinguished from this state of nervous fatigue by the second sign (the soul ordinarily keeps the memory of God with solicitude and painful anxiety for fear it may be falling back), and by the third sign (the quasi-impossibility to meditate, but the

ability to keep a simple and loving gaze on God, the beginning of infused contemplation). The ardent desire for God and for perfection, which is manifested by these signs, distinguishes notably this passive purification from neurasthenia which may sometimes co-exist with it.

Conduct to be Observed in the Night of the Senses

In *The Dark Night*, St. John of the Cross treats of the conduct to be observed in the night of the senses.¹²⁶⁶ He gives there, first of all, rules for direction, then he speaks of the trials which ordinarily accompany this state. We shall set forth here the essential part of his teaching on this point. This teaching may, moreover, be useful not only for those who are in this period of obscurity and prolonged aridity, but also for those who observe that in their interior life day and night alternate somewhat as they do in nature. The author of *The Imitation* frequently points out this alternation. As in nature it is good that night succeed day, so also is it suitable in the life of the soul. Furthermore, one must know how to conduct oneself in these two phases that differ so greatly; especially is this knowledge necessary when the obscure phase is prolonged, as it is in the period we are considering.

FOUR RULES OF DIRECTION RELATIVE TO THIS STATE

The mystical doctor points out first of all in regard to those who are in this period of transition: "If they meet with no one who understands the matter, these persons fall away and abandon the right road; or they become weak, or at least put hindrances in the way of their further advancement, because of the great efforts they make to proceed in their former way of meditation, fatiguing their natural powers beyond measure." At this time, it is advisable for them to seek counsel from an enlightened director because of the difficulties which arise in the interior life by reason of the subtraction of sensible graces, the growing difficulty in meditating, and also by reason of the concomitant temptations against chastity and patience which the devil then awakens rather frequently in order to turn the soul away from prayer.

In the second place, says St. John of the Cross: "It behooves those who find themselves in this condition to take courage and persevere in patience. Let them not afflict themselves but put their confidence in God, who never forsakes those who seek Him with a pure and upright heart. Neither will He withhold from them all that is necessary for them on this road until He brings them to the clear and pure light of love, which He will show them in that other dark night of the spirit, if they shall merit an entrance into it." Consequently, in this aridity and powerlessness one must not become discouraged or abandon prayer as if it were useless. On the contrary, it becomes much more fruitful if the soul perseveres in humility, abnegation, and trust in God. Prolonged sensible aridity and growing inability to meditate are the sign of a new, higher life. Instead of grieving over this condition, a learned and experienced director rejoices; it is the generous entrance into "the narrow way" which ascends as it broadens, and which will become increasingly wide, immense as God Himself to whom it leads. At this stage the soul is under the happy necessity of not being content with weak acts of faith, hope, and love. Imperfect acts (*actus remissi*) of these virtues no longer suffice here; more lofty and more meritorious acts are necessary. According to St. Thomas, it is characteristic of these acts to obtain immediately the increase of grace and charity which they merit.¹²⁶⁷

The spiritual man who has reached this stage is like a man who in climbing a mountain comes to a difficult spot where, to make progress, he must have a keener desire for the goal to be attained. We are here at the aurora of the illuminative life; it richly deserves that we show generosity in our passage through the dark night which precedes it. Here it is a question of being purified from the remains of the seven capital sins that stain the spiritual life; if one is not purified from them on earth while meriting, one must be cleansed in purgatory without meriting.

The passive purification which we are speaking of is in the normal way of sanctity, which may be defined as union with God and sufficient purity to enter heaven immediately. This degree of purity is certainly in the normal way of heaven, whether a person obtains it on earth, or only at the end of his purgatory. Purgatory, which is a penalty, presupposes sins that could have been avoided. Therefore the soul should trust in God while this painful work of purification is being accomplished.

In the third place, as St. John of the Cross points out here,¹²⁶⁸ when persons can no longer meditate discursively: "All they have to do is to keep their soul free,... contenting themselves simply with directing their attention lovingly and calmly toward God." To wish to return at any cost to discursive meditation, would be to wish to run counter to the current of grace instead of following it, and to give ourselves great trouble without profit. It would be like running toward the spring of living water when we have already reached its brim; continuing to run, we withdraw from it. It would be like continuing to spell when we already know how to read several words at a glance. It would be to fall back instead of allowing ourselves to be drawn, to be lifted up by God. However, if the difficulty in meditating does not increase and makes itself felt only from time to time, it is well to return to simplified, affective meditation whenever possible: for example, to the very slow meditation of the Our Father.

St. John gives a fourth rule of direction for those who, having reached this state of prolonged aridity, wish, not to return to reasoned meditation, but to feel some consolation. St. John of the Cross says on this subject: “All they have to do is to keep their soul free,... and all this without anxiety or effort, or immoderate desire to feel and taste His presence. For all such efforts disquiet the soul, and distract it from the peaceful quiet and sweet tranquillity of contemplation to which they are now admitted.¹²⁶⁹... If they were now to exert their interior faculties, they would simply hinder and ruin the good which, in that repose, God is working in the soul; for if a man while sitting for his portrait cannot be still, but moves about, the painter will never depict his face, and even the work already done will be spoiled.... The more it strives to find help in affections and knowledge, the more will it feel the deficiency which cannot now be supplied in that way.”¹²⁷⁰ In other words, natural activity exercising itself counter to the gifts of the Holy Ghost, through self-seeking opposes an obstacle to their most delicate inspirations. In prayer, we should not seek to feel the gift of God, but should receive it with docility and disinterestedness in the obscurity of faith. Spiritual joy will be added later on to the act of contemplation and love of God; but it is not joy that should be sought, it is God Himself, who is greatly superior to His gifts.

If the soul that has reached this period of transition is faithful to what has been said, then will be realized what St. John of the Cross affirms: “By not hindering the operation of infused contemplation, to which God is now admitting it, the soul is refreshed in peaceful abundance, and set on fire with the spirit of love, which this contemplation, dim and secret, induces and establishes within it.”¹²⁷¹

As the mystical doctor says: “The soul should content itself simply with directing its attention lovingly and calmly toward God,” with the general knowledge of His infinite goodness, as when after months of absence, a loving son again meets his good mother who has been expecting him. He does not analyze his sentiments and his mother’s as a psychologist would; he is content with an affectionate, tranquil, and profound gaze which in its simplicity is far more penetrating than all psychological analyses.

This beginning of infused contemplation united to love is already the eminent exercise of the theological virtues and of the gifts of the Holy Ghost which accompany them. In it there is an infused act of penetrating faith;¹²⁷² therein the soul discovers increasingly the spirit of the Gospel, the spirit which vivifies the letter. Thus are verified Christ’s words: “The Paraclete, the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things and bring all things to your mind, whatsoever I shall have said to you.”¹²⁷³ St. John also wrote to the faithful to whom he directed his first epistle: “And as for you, let the unction, which you have received from Him, abide in you.”¹²⁷⁴ And you have no need that any man teach you;... His unction teacheth you of all things.”¹²⁷⁵ In the silence of prayer, the soul receives here the profound meaning of what it has often read and meditated on in the Gospel: for example, the intrinsic meaning of the evangelical beatitudes: blessed are the poor, the meek, those who weep for their sins, those who hunger and thirst for justice, the merciful, the pure of heart, the peacemakers, those who suffer persecution for justice, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

In this way, as a rule, begins infused prayer, the spiritual elevation of the soul toward God, above the senses, the imagination, and reasoning; it is adoration “in spirit and in truth,” which goes beyond the formulas of faith to penetrate the mysteries which they express and to live by them. The formulas are no longer a term, but a point of departure.

Nevertheless we should remember here what St. John of the Cross says in *The Ascent of Mount Carmel*: “The beginning contemplative is not yet so far removed from discursive meditation that he cannot return occasionally to its practice,”¹²⁷⁶ when he is no longer under the special influence of the Holy Ghost, which facilitates recollection. St. Teresa, in her *Life* (chap. 14), also speaks of the necessity at the beginning of the prayer of quiet of having recourse to a simplified meditation, symbolized by the hydraulic machine called a *noria*. This passage from St. Teresa’s life corresponds to what St. John of the Cross has just said about the work of the understanding, which prepares the soul to receive a more profound recollection from God. Thus it is fitting at the beginning of prayer to meditate slowly on the petitions of the Our Father, or to converse in a childlike manner with Mary Mediatrix that she may lead us to close union with her Son. It is well for us to recall how He Himself gave His life for us and how He does not cease to offer Himself for us in the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. If we follow this way faithfully, we shall receive, at least from time to time, an interior light that will give us the profound meaning of the Passion, and also of the infinite riches contained in the Holy Eucharist. Thus our interior life will grow more simple while becoming more lofty, which is essential if it is to radiate and to bear fruit.

We may sum up the conduct to be observed in the passive purification of the senses, called also the night of the senses, as follows: docility to the director, trust in God, a simple and loving gaze on Him, abstention from seeking to feel consolation. To complete this chapter, we must also speak of the trials which frequently accompany this period of transition.

TRIALS WHICH ORDINARILY ACCOMPANY THE NIGHT OF THE SENSES

To this painful purification in which, under the influence of the gift of knowledge, we experience the emptiness of created things, are customarily added temptations against chastity and patience. These temptations are permitted by God to provoke a strong reaction of these virtues, which have their seat in the sensible appetites. This reaction should strengthen these virtues,

root them more deeply, and thereby purify more profoundly the sensibility in which they are located, and subject it increasingly to right reason illumined by faith. For a like reason, there will be in the night of the spirit temptations of the same kind against the virtues which are in the highest part of the soul, especially against the theological virtues.

These concomitant trials have an attenuated form in many souls; in others they are more accentuated and then they announce that God wishes to lead these souls to the full perfection of Christian life if they are faithful.¹²⁷⁷

The struggle against the temptations of which we are speaking necessitates energetic acts of the virtues of chastity and patience; as a result these virtues then take deeper root in the sensibility that has been tilled and upturned. They become in it like very fertile seeds of a higher life. The acquired moral virtues cause the direction of right reason to descend, in fact, into the sensibility, and the infused moral virtues cause the divine life of grace to penetrate into it. Thus conceived, this struggle against temptation has a great and beautiful character. Without it we would often be content with a lesser effort, with weak, less intense, virtuous acts, *actus remissi*, as theologians call them, that is, acts inferior to the degree of virtue that we possess. Having three talents, we act as if we had only two. These weak virtuous acts, as St. Thomas points out,¹²⁷⁸ do not immediately obtain the increase of charity which they merit, whereas intense or perfect acts obtain it immediately.

Temptation places us in the necessity of producing these very meritorious acts, occasionally heroic, which root the acquired virtues and obtain immediately for us a proportionate increase of the infused virtues. For this reason, the angel Raphael said to Tobias: "Because thou wast acceptable to God, it was necessary that temptation should prove thee."¹²⁷⁹ St. Paul also says: "God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that which you are able; but will make also with temptation issue, that you may be able to bear it."¹²⁸⁰ Isaias speaks in like manner: "It is He that giveth strength to the weary, and increaseth force and might to them that are not.... But they that hope in the Lord shall renew their strength. They shall take wings as eagles."¹²⁸¹

Temptation reveals to us our misery and our need of the grace of God: "What doth he know, that hath not been tried?"¹²⁸² Temptation obliges us to pray, to beg God to come to our aid, to place our confidence in Him and not in ourselves. Because of this trust in God which the man who is tried should have, St. Paul writes: "For when I am weak, then am I powerful"¹²⁸³ The apostle St. James also says: "My brethren, count it all joy when you shall fall into divers temptations; knowing that the trying of your faith worketh patience. And patience hath a perfect work; that you may be perfect."¹²⁸⁴

To these temptations against chastity and patience is also added at times in this period of the interior life the loss of certain temporal goods, of fortune, honors, friendships on which we dwelt too much. God comes at this time to ask us to give Him the lively affection which we have not thought of giving to Him. Sometimes He also permits illnesses, that we may learn to suffer, and also that we may be reminded that of ourselves we can do nothing and that we need the divine favors for the life of the body and that of the soul.

THE EFFECTS OF THE PASSIVE PURIFICATION OF THE SENSES

If we bear these trials well, they produce precious effects in us. It is said that "patience produces roses." Among the effects of the passive purification of the senses, must be numbered a profound and experimental knowledge of God and self.

St. John of the Cross points out: "These aridities and the emptiness of the faculties as to their former abounding, and the difficulty which good works present, bring the soul to a knowledge of its own vileness and misery."¹²⁸⁵

This knowledge is the effect of nascent infused contemplation, which shows that infused contemplation is in the normal way of sanctity. St. John of the Cross says: "The soul possesses and retains more truly that excellent and necessary virtue of self-knowledge, counting itself for nothing, and having no satisfaction in itself, because it sees that of itself it does and can do nothing. This diminished satisfaction with self, and the affliction it feels because it thinks that it is not serving God, God esteems more highly than all its former delights and all its good works."¹²⁸⁶

With this knowledge of its indigence, its poverty, the soul comprehends better the majesty of God, His infinite goodness toward us, the value also of Christ's merits, of His precious blood, the infinite value of the Mass, and the value of Communion. "God enlightens the soul, making it see not only its own misery and meanness,... but also His grandeur and majesty."¹²⁸⁷

St. Teresa speaks in like manner: "For instance, they read that we must not be troubled when men speak ill of us, that we are to be then more pleased than when they speak well of us,... with many other things of the same kind. The disposition to practice this must be, in my opinion, the gift of God, for it seems to me a supernatural good."¹²⁸⁸ "People may desire honors or possessions in monasteries as well as outside them (yet the sin is greater as the temptation is less), but such souls, although they may have spent years in prayer, or rather in speculations (for *perfect prayer eventually destroys these vices*), will never make great progress nor enjoy the real fruit of prayer."¹²⁸⁹

St. Catherine of Siena, too, taught the same doctrine: that the knowledge of God and that of our indigence are like the highest and the lowest points of a circle which could grow forever.¹²⁹⁰ This infused knowledge of our misery is the source of true humility of heart, of the humility which leads one to desire to be nothing that God may be all, *amare nesciri et pro nihilo*

reputari. Infused knowledge of the infinite goodness of God gives birth in us to a much more lively charity, a more generous and disinterested love of God and of souls in Him, a greater confidence in prayer.

As St. John of the Cross says: “The love of God is practiced, because the soul is no longer attracted by sweetness and consolation, but by God only.... In the midst of these aridities and hardships, God communicates to the soul, when it least expects it, spiritual sweetness, most pure love, and spiritual knowledge of the most exalted kind, of greater worth and profit than any of which it had previous experience, though at first the soul may not think so, for the spiritual influence now communicated is most delicate and imperceptible by sense.”^{[1291](#)}

The soul travels here in a spiritual light and shade; it rises above the inferior obscurity which comes from matter, error, and sin; it enters the higher obscurity which comes from a light that is too great for our weak eyes. It is the obscurity of the divine life, the light of which is inaccessible to the senses and to natural reason. But between these two obscurities, the lower and the higher, there is a ray of illumination from the Holy Ghost; it is the illuminative life which truly begins. Then are realized the Savior’s words: “He that followeth Me walketh not in darkness, but shall have the light of life,”^{[1292](#)} and he already has it.

Under this light, affective charity becomes effective and generous. Through the spirit of sacrifice it more and more takes first place in the soul; it establishes peace in us and gives it to others. Such are the principal effects of the passive purification of the senses, which subjects our sensibility to the spirit and spiritualizes that sensibility. Thus this purification appears in the normal way of sanctity. Later the passive purification of the spirit will have as its purpose to supernaturalize our spirit, to subject it fully to God in view of perfect divine union, which is the normal prelude to that of eternity. These are the superior laws of the life of grace, or of its full development, in its relation to the two parts of the soul. The senses should, in the end, be fully subjected to the spirit, and the spirit to God.

Finally, it should be pointed out that the passive purification of the senses, even for those who enter it, is more or less manifest and also more or less well borne. St. John of the Cross points out this fact when he speaks of those who show less generosity: “The night of aridities is not continuous with them, they are sometimes in it, and sometimes not; they are at one time unable to meditate, and at another able as before.... These persons are never wholly weaned from the breasts of meditations and reflections, but only, as I have said, at intervals and at certain seasons.”^{[1293](#)} In *The Living Flame*, the mystical doctor, explaining why this is so, says: “Because these souls flee purifying suffering, God does not continue to purify them; they wish to be perfect without allowing themselves to be led by the way of trial which forms the perfect.”^{[1294](#)}

Such is the more or less generous transition to a form of higher life. We see the logical and vital succession of phases through which the soul should pass to reach the perfect purity that would permit it to enter heaven immediately. It is not a mechanical juxtaposition of successive states: it is the organic development of life. In his discussion of this point St. John of the Cross caused spiritual theology to advance notably, by showing the necessity and the intimate nature of these purifications, which are an anticipated purgatory in which one merits and advances, whereas in that after death, one no longer merits. May the Lord grant us the grace thus to suffer our purgatory before death rather than after our last sigh. In the evening of life we shall be judged on the purity of our love of God and of souls in God.

The Spiritual Age of Proficients

Principal Characteristics

Since we have discussed the difficult period called the night of the senses, which, according to St. John of the Cross, marks the entrance into the illuminative way of proficients, we should now point out the principal traits of the spiritual character of proficients, the characteristics of this age of the interior life.¹²⁹⁵

The mentality of proficients should be described by insisting on their knowledge and love of God, and by noting the differences between this spiritual age and the preceding one, just as one remarks those of adolescence and childhood. The adolescent is not only a grown-up child, but he has also a new mentality; he sees things in a less imaginative, more rational manner; he has different preoccupations, just as the child is not an adolescent in miniature. From the spiritual point of view there is something similar in respect to the different ages of the interior life.

THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD IN PROFICIENTS

In the preceding period, the beginner scarcely knew God except in the mirror of sensible things, whether in those of nature, or in those mentioned in the parables of the Gospel, or in the exterior acts of worship; and he knew himself only in a very superficial manner.

The proficient obtained a deeper self-knowledge while passing through the period of prolonged aridity which marks the second conversion. With this knowledge of his poverty, of his spiritual indigence, there grows within him by contrast a quasi-experimental knowledge of God, not only in the mirror of the sensible things of nature, of the parables, of exterior worship, but in the spiritual mirror of the mysteries of salvation with which he familiarizes himself. These mysteries, which are those of the incarnation of the Word, of the redemption, of eternal life, the rosary daily places before our eyes by recalling to us the Savior's childhood, His sorrowful passion, His resurrection and ascension. If the proficient is faithful, he goes beyond the sensible aspect of these mysteries, he attains all that is spiritual in them, the infinite value of the merits of Christ; then the rosary is no longer the mechanical recitation of the Hail Mary, but a living thing, a school of contemplation. The joyful mysteries bring us the good news of the annunciation and the nativity of our Savior, which constitute true, enduring, and deep joys far above the pleasures of the world and the satisfactions of pride. Likewise, in the midst of our sufferings, which are often without reason, at times overwhelming, almost always badly borne, the sorrowful mysteries repeat to us that our sins should be the object of our grief. They make us desire to know them better, to experience a sincere sorrow for them, and thus we begin to comprehend the profound meaning and the infinite value of Christ's passion and its effects in our lives. Finally, in the midst of the instability and uncertainties of this life, the glorious mysteries recall to us the immutability and the perfect happiness of eternal life, which is the goal of our journey.

The proficient who would thus live a little better each day by the spirit of the rosary, would reach the contemplation of the mystery of Christ, a certain penetrating understanding of the life of the mystical body, or of the Church militant, suffering, and triumphant. Under the continual direction of Jesus and of Mary Mediatrix, he would enter increasingly into the mystery of the communion of saints. If he should listen daily to this secret teaching in the depth of his heart, this prayer would kindle in him the desire of heaven, of the glory of God, and the salvation of souls; it would give him a love of the cross and strength to carry it, and from time to time a foretaste of heaven, a certain savor of eternal life. As a traveler toward eternity (viator), he would occasionally enjoy it in hope and would rest on the heart of Him who is the way, the truth, and the life.

The proficient who has such knowledge of God no longer knows Him only in the sensible mirror of the starry sky or of the parables, but in the spiritual mirror of the great mysteries of the Incarnation, the redemption, and eternal life which is promised to us. He thus grows increasingly familiar with these mysteries of faith, he penetrates them a little, tastes them, sees their application to his daily life. According to the terminology of Dionysius, which is preserved by St. Thomas,¹²⁹⁶ the soul rises thus by a spiral movement from the mysteries of Christ's childhood to those of His passion, resurrection, ascension, and glory, and in them it contemplates the radiation of the sovereign goodness of God, who thus communicates Himself admirably to us. Goodness is essentially diffusive, and that of God diffuses itself on us by the redeeming Incarnation and by the revelation of eternal life already begun, in a sense, in the life of grace.¹²⁹⁷

In this more or less frequent contemplation, the proficients or advanced receive, in the measure of their fidelity and

generosity, the light of the gift of understanding, which renders their faith more penetrating and which makes them glimpse the lofty and simple beauty of these mysteries, a beauty accessible to all those who are truly humble and pure of heart.

Consequently this period of the interior life merits the name of illuminative way. In the preceding period, the Lord conquered our sensibility by certain graces, to which the name sensible is given because of the sensible consolation they bring. Then the soul, which had become too attached to these sensible consolations, had to be weaned from them that it might receive a more spiritual and substantial food.

Now God conquers our intellect; He enlightens it as He alone can; He renders this superior faculty increasingly docile to His inspirations that it may grasp divine truth. He subjects our intellect to Himself in this way while vivifying it. He gives it lights that are often scarcely perceived, but that make us understand ever better the spirit of the Gospel. He lifts us up above the excessive preoccupations and the complications of a learning that is too human. He makes us aspire to the superior simplicity of the loving gaze which rests in the truth that makes man free. He makes us understand the meaning of these words: "If you continue in My word, you shall be My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free."¹²⁹⁸ This word will deliver you from the prejudices of the world, from its vain complications, its lies, the shortsightedness of unconscious pride, and from that of covetousness. Divine truth will give itself profoundly to you and will also dispel the false luster of all that can seduce you. It will free you from what Scripture calls "the bewitching of vanity,"¹²⁹⁹ from the vertigo of passion which blinds you to the true imperishable goods.

In all this there is a knowledge of God and of self notably different from that drawn from books simply by reading. We begin to know in a truly living manner the Gospel, the Eucharist, Jesus Christ, who does not cease to intercede for us and who gives us always new graces to incorporate us in Him, in His mystical body for eternity. The life of the Church appears in its grandeur; we think of the spiritual summits of the Church in our day, which must number very holy souls as it did in the past and as it will in the future. Such is the work of the Holy Ghost in men's hearts.

Books alone cannot give this experimental knowledge. A treatise on the Eucharist will show at some length, by the analysis of scriptural texts, that this sacrament was instituted by Christ; it will defend speculatively the Real Presence and transubstantiation against ancient and modern errors; it will compare the different explanations which theologians give of the Sacrifice of the Mass, and will enumerate the fruits of Communion. These books, which are indispensable for the training of the priest, end in precise formulas. These formulas, however, should not be an end for us; for the interior soul they should be a point of departure. To live with a holy realism by the mystery itself, the soul should go beyond them.

By faith in the Eucharist, the interior soul already holds the truths that it needs to know; it is useless for such a soul to embarrass itself with discussions on the history of this dogma, on transubstantiation or the Eucharistic accidents; it needs to live by the truths of faith and of the liturgy, as Book IV of *The Imitation* points out. To live in this way, the soul must receive the inspirations of the Holy Ghost with docility. Not in vain are the seven gifts given to all the just; they are given to perfect the virtues. Thus the gift of understanding should make all the just who are faithful to its inspirations penetrate the meaning and import of the formulas of faith; simple souls who are clean of heart really see this import much better than theologians who are too satisfied with their acquired knowledge. *Mirabilis Deus in sanctis suis*.

The contemplation of divine things may be greatly hindered by self-sufficiency which leads a man to think he already knows the interior life, when, as a matter of fact, he still has much to learn. The study of books will never replace prayer; for this reason the great doctors of the Church have declared that they learned more in prayer at the foot of the crucifix or near the tabernacle than in the most learned works. Books give the letter and explain it; intimate prayer obtains the spirit which vivifies, the interior light which sometimes illuminates in an instant principles often repeated, but whose universal radiation had not been grasped. Many things in Christian life are illuminated, for example, in the light of St. Paul's words: "What hast thou that thou hast not received?"¹³⁰⁰ This principle is the basis of humility, gratitude, and true love of God, that we may respond to God's love for us. In the same way we then increasingly understand the profound meaning of these words: God is the Author of being, of life, the Author of salvation, of grace, of final perseverance.

Such is, though very imperfectly expressed, the knowledge of God which proficients need and which is found in the illuminative way. This period, in which the soul begins to contemplate God in the spiritual mirror of the mysteries of salvation, already surpasses the ascetical life; it is a beginning of the mystical life. A denial of this fact would be a failure to recognize the grace of God. It would likewise be a failure to recognize it if one should deny the mystical character of *The Imitation* in which all interior souls may find their nourishment. This mystical character is a sign that the infused contemplation of the mysteries, which is discussed in this book, is in the normal way of sanctity.

THE LOVE OF GOD AND OF SOULS IN PROFICIENTS

What is the normal effect of the interior lights received on the mysteries of the life and death of our Savior, on that of eternal life which is promised us? These lights lead the soul to love God, no longer as in the preceding period, only by fleeing mortal

sin and deliberate venial sin, but by imitating the virtues of Christ, His humility, meekness, patience, by observing not only the precepts necessary for all, but the evangelical counsels of poverty, chastity, obedience, or at least the spirit of these counsels, and by avoiding imperfections.

Then with a greater abundance of interior light, the faithful soul will receive, at least occasionally, keen desires for the glory of God and the salvation of souls. Then that hunger and thirst after the justice of God which Christ speaks of in the beatitudes will grow. The soul will see the truth of His words: “If any man thirst, let him come to Me, and drink... Out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water.” The soul will then receive, at least for a time, a greater facility for prayer. Not infrequently there is at this stage the infused prayer of quiet in which the will is captivated for a very short time by the attraction of God.^{[1301](#)} Persons dedicated to the apostolate have also in this period a greater facility to act in the service of God, to teach, direct, and organize works.

In such a life the soul loves God, no longer only “with its whole heart” in the midst of sensible consolations, but “with all its soul,” with all its activities, not yet however “with all its strength,” as will happen in the night of the spirit, nor as yet “with all its mind,” for the soul is not yet established in this superior region. That it may be established there, the passive purification of the higher part of the soul will be needed, a purification that brings about the disappearance of all the spiritual or intellectual pride which still mingles in the facility for prayer and action, which we have just mentioned. The soul has still a long road to travel, like Elias who had to walk forty days and forty nights even to Mt. Horeb; but the soul grows, its virtues develop and become solid virtues, the expression of a love of God and souls, which is not only affective, but effective or efficacious.

We shall now discuss these Christian virtues, their relation especially to the love of God, as do the apostle St. John, St. Paul, and all spiritual writers after them. For this reason we shall insist on the moral virtues that have a closer relation to the theological virtues: those of humility, meekness, and patience; those that correspond to the counsels of poverty, chastity, obedience; also those pointed out by Christ when He speaks of the necessity of uniting the prudence of the serpent to the simplicity of the dove, or to perfect sincerity. We shall thus be led to speak of what the progress of the theological virtues and of the gifts of the Holy Ghost should be in the illuminative way under the direction of the interior Master. Thus we follow an ascending way toward union with God.^{[1302](#)}

Chapter 7

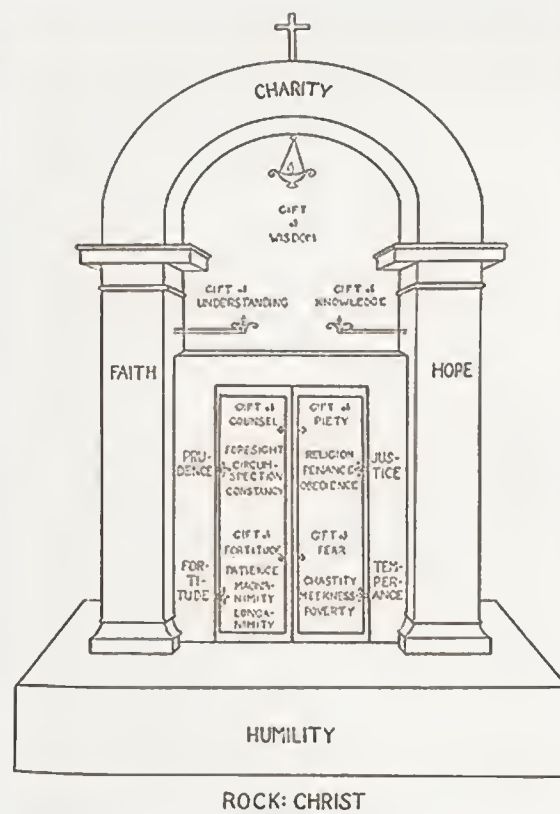
The Spiritual Edifice in Proficients

To describe what the progress of the Christian virtues should be in the illuminative way, we must recall the profound meaning of the traditional symbolism in the figure of the spiritual edifice. In this figure we find many of the teachings of Christ and St. Paul, such as St. Augustine and St. Thomas understood them in their works where they speak of the subordination of the virtues and of their connection with the seven gifts of the Holy Ghost.

Christ is the first to tell us, at the end of the Sermon on the Mount, that we must build our spiritual edifice not on sand, but on a rock, and St. Paul adds that the rock is Christ Himself on whom everything must rest.

To build this temple we must, therefore, dig the foundation until we find the rock. According to St. Augustine, the excavation symbolizes humility, which is, says St. Thomas, a fundamental virtue, inasmuch as it removes pride, the source of every sin. If the soul is empty of self, it will be filled with God; if it does not seek itself, it will seek God in everything. To build this temple we must, therefore, not scratch the soil, but dig very deep; and if we allow the Lord to work, He Himself will dig by making us profit by the humiliations He sends us.

As the illustration shows, from humility, the base of this excavation resting on Christ the foundation rock, rises the first column of the edifice, the pillar of faith, as St. Paul calls it. Faith is called a fundamental virtue, not only like humility in that it removes an obstacle, but in that all the other infused virtues rest positively on it.¹³⁰³ Opposite the pillar of faith is that of hope, which makes us desire God, eternal life, relying on the divine help for its attainment.



These two pillars support the cupola of charity, the highest of the virtues. The part of the cupola which rises toward heaven symbolizes charity toward God, whereas that which slopes toward the earth is a figure of fraternal charity, which makes us love our neighbor for God because he is a child of God or called to become one. The cupola is surmounted by the cross to remind us that our love ascends toward God only through Christ and the merits of His passion.

St. Augustine, speaking of the beatitudes in his commentary on the Sermon on the Mount, and St. Thomas tell us that to each of the three theological virtues corresponds a gift of the Holy Ghost; these three gifts are symbolized by three lamps. From the pillar of faith is suspended the lamp of the gift of understanding, which renders faith penetrating. By faith we adhere to the word of God; by the special inspiration of the gift of understanding we penetrate it, as for example, when assailed by temptation, we comprehend that God is truly our last end, the one thing necessary, and that we must remain faithful to Him.

From the pillar of hope is suspended the lamp of the gift of knowledge, which, according to St. Augustine and St. Thomas, makes us know things, not by their supreme cause as wisdom does, but by their proximate, defectible, and often deficient cause. For this reason, according to these doctors, the gift of knowledge shows us the emptiness of earthly things and the vanity of human helps in attaining a divine end. In this sense, the gift, which perfects faith, also perfects hope and leads us to aspire more strongly toward eternal life and to rely on the help of God, the formal motive of hope, to attain it.¹³⁰⁴

From the cupola symbolizing charity is suspended another lamp, the gift of wisdom, which illuminates the whole interior of the spiritual edifice and makes us see all things as coming from God, supreme Cause and last End, from His love or at least by His permission for a greater good which we shall some day see and which from time to time becomes visible here on earth. In this spiritual temple, says St. Paul, dwells the Holy Ghost and with Him the Father and the Son. They are there as in a mansion, where They may be and are from time to time quasi-experientially known and loved.

However, to enter this spiritual edifice there must be a door. According to tradition, in particular the teaching of St. Gregory the Great, often quoted by St. Thomas, the four hinges of this twoleafed door symbolize the four cardinal virtues of prudence, justice, fortitude, and temperance. Their name “cardinal” comes from the Latin *cardines*, meaning hinges. This meaning is preserved in the current expression, “That man is unhinged,” when irritation makes a man fail in these four virtues. Without them man is outside the spiritual temple in the uncultivated region ravaged by the evil weeds of egoism and inordinate inclinations.¹³⁰⁵ The two upper hinges on the temple door symbolize prudence and justice, which are in the higher part of the soul, and the two lower hinges are figures of fortitude and temperance, which have their seat in the sensible appetites, common alike to man and animal.

To each of these four hinges is fastened a triple piece of ironwork, symbolizing the principal virtues annexed to each of the cardinal virtues. Thus, to prudence is attached foresight (a reflection of divine Providence), circumspection attentive to the circumstances in the midst of which we must act, and steadfastness or constancy, that we may not because of difficulties abandon good decisions and resolutions made after mature reflection in the presence of God. Inconstancy, says St. Thomas, is a

To the virtue of justice are also attached several virtues. Those which relate to God as forms of justice toward Him are: religion, which renders to Him the worship due Him; penance, which offers Him reparation for the offenses committed against Him; obedience, which makes man obey the divine commandments or the orders of the spiritual or temporal representatives of God.

The virtue of fortitude makes us keep to the right road in the presence of great dangers instead of yielding to fear; it manifests itself in the soldier who dies for his country and in the martyr who dies for the faith. To fortitude several virtues are also attached: notably, patience that we may endure daily vexations without weakening; magnanimity which tends to great things to be accomplished without becoming discouraged in the face of difficulties; longanimity which makes us bear over a long period of time incessant contradictions that sometimes are renewed daily for many years.

Lastly, to the virtue of temperance, which moderates the inordinate impulses of our sensible appetites, are attached chastity, virginity, meekness which moderates and represses irritation or anger, and evangelical poverty which makes us use the things of the world as though not using them, without becoming attached to them.

According to St. Augustine and St. Thomas, to each of these cardinal virtues corresponds a gift of the Holy Ghost, symbolized by so many precious stones which ornament the door; *portae nitent margaritis*, as we read in the hymn for the feast of the dedication of a church.

To prudence corresponds manifestly the gift of counsel, which enlightens us when even infused prudence would remain uncertain, for example, as to how to answer an indiscreet question without telling a lie. To justice, which in regard to God is called the virtue of religion, corresponds the gift of piety, which comes to our help in prolonged aridities by inspiring in us a filial affection for God. To the virtue of fortitude corresponds the gift of fortitude, so manifest in the martyrs. To the virtue of temperance, and especially of chastity, corresponds the gift of filial fear, which enables us to surmount the temptations of the flesh, according to the words of the Psalmist: "Pierce Thou my flesh with Thy fear."

Thus the picture of the spiritual edifice condenses the teaching of the Gospel, the writings of St. Paul and of the great doctors on the subordination of the virtues and their connection with the gifts of the Holy Ghost.

This structure may appear somewhat complicated when insistence is placed on the virtues attached to the cardinal virtues; but the superior simplicity of the things of God stands out if the following profound statement is considered carefully: When in a soul or a community the foundation of the edifice and its summit are what they ought to be, in other words, when there is profound humility and true fraternal charity, the great sign of the progress of the love of God, then everything goes well. Why is this? Because God then supplies by His gifts for what may be lacking in acquired prudence or natural energy; and He constantly reminds souls of their duties, giving them His grace to accomplish them. "God... giveth grace to the humble," and He never fails those who understand the precept of love: "Love one another as I have loved you; by this shall all men know that you are My disciples."

Chapter 8

Prudence and the Interior Life

“Be ye therefore wise as serpents and simple as doves.”

Matt. 10: 16

We shall discuss the moral virtues in the service of charity and in their relation to the interior life, showing how they ought to grow in the illuminative way and what their true place is in the spiritual edifice.

Whereas the theological virtues are concerned with the last end and lead us to believe in God, to hope in Him, to love Him above all, the moral virtues have to do with the means to be employed in order to obtain the last end. Among them we distinguish four, called the cardinal virtues, because they are, as we have seen, like the four hinges (*cardines*) of the door which gives access to the temple of the interior life. The two principal walls of this temple symbolize faith and hope, the dome is the symbol of charity, and the foundation is humility. The four cardinal virtues, to which are attached the other moral virtues, are, as moralists, even those of pagan antiquity, commonly teach: prudence, which directs the others; justice, which renders to each man his due; fortitude or courage, which keeps us from letting ourselves be cast down in an unreasonable manner in the face of danger; temperance, which causes the light of reason to descend into our sensibility especially under the forms of sobriety and of chastity. Other moral virtues, as we have said, such as patience and meekness, are manifestly attached to the cardinal virtues and are called connected virtues.

To understand clearly the teaching of St. Thomas on the most important of these virtues, we should recall that he admits a difference not only of degree, but of nature, in other words, a specific difference between the acquired moral virtues which were described by the pagan philosophers, and the infused moral virtues, which are received in baptism and grow in us with charity. It is of these virtues that the Gospel speaks.^{[1307](#)}

The difference separating these two orders of moral virtues is most profound; it is that which distinguishes the natural, or rational, order from that of grace. Here we have at the same time a different formal object, motive, and end.

The acquired moral virtues, which were well described by Aristotle, establish the rectitude of right reason in the will and sensibility. Under the direction of acquired prudence, justice gradually reigns in the will; rational fortitude and reasonable moderation prevail in the sensible appetites. The infused moral virtues, received in baptism, belong to a much higher order; they have not only a rational but a supernatural formal motive. Under the direction of infused faith, prudence and the Christian moral virtues cause the light of grace, or the divine rule of the children of God, to descend into the will and the sensible appetites.

Between the acquired prudence described by Aristotle and the infused prudence received in baptism, there is a measureless distance, far greater than that of an octave, which in music separates two notes of the same name at the two extremities of a complete scale. Thus a distinction is commonly made between the philosophical temperance of a Socrates and Christian temperance, or the philosophical poverty of a Crates and evangelical poverty, or again the rational measure to be observed in the passions and Christian mortification. For example, by itself acquired temperance directed by reason alone does not take into consideration the mysteries of faith, our elevation to the supernatural life, original sin, the infinite gravity of mortal sin as an offense against God, the value of charity or the divine friendship. Neither does it consider the elevation of our supernatural end: “To be perfect as our heavenly Father is perfect,” with a perfection of the same order as His, although unequal to His.

Infused temperance, on the contrary, which is directed by divine faith and Christian prudence, takes positively into account all these revealed mysteries; it is ordained to make us, not only truly reasonable beings, but to give us the supernaturalized sensible appetites of a child of God.

Thus we see that these two virtues which bear the same name of temperance are of very different metal: one is silver, the other gold. In spite of the measureless distance separating them, the infused virtue and the acquired virtue of the same name are exercised together in the Christian in the state of grace, somewhat like the art of the pianist, which is in his intellect, and the agility of his fingers which gives to his art an extrinsic facility.

Thus the acquired virtue should, in the Christian, be at the service of the infused virtue of the same name, just as the imagination and the memory of a learned man concur in the work of his intellect. Thereby the moral virtues are also at the service of charity, the highest of the infused virtues. We shall discuss the chief among these virtues, and first of all prudence.

Christ spoke of prudence on several different occasions in the Gospel, particularly when He said to the apostles: “I send you as sheep in the midst of wolves: Be ye therefore wise as serpents and simple as doves.”^{[1308](#)} Later on He also says: “Who, thinkest thou, is a faithful and wise servant?... Blessed is that servant.... Amen I say to you, he shall place him over all his

goods.”¹³⁰⁹

Prudence, which is requisite for every man that he may conduct himself well, is especially fitting for those who must counsel and direct others. We must have a correct idea of this virtue if we are not to confound it with defects which sometimes resemble it, and if we are to distinguish clearly between acquired prudence, good as it is in its own order, and infused prudence. For this reason we shall first discuss defects to be avoided, then acquired prudence, and finally infused prudence and the gift of counsel, which often comes to the aid of the virtue in difficult cases.

DEFECTS TO BE AVOIDED

The value of the virtue is better seen by considering the disadvantages of the contrary defects, which are often quite manifest. Therefore Scripture, the more strongly to recommend prudence to us, shows us the dangers and the results of lack of consideration.

It contrasts for us the prudent and the foolish virgins.¹³¹⁰ St. Peter and St. Paul praise the prudence of the aged, especially of those who are charged with watching over the first Christian communities,¹³¹¹ adding: “Be not wise in your own conceits,”¹³¹² and declaring that God “will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the prudence of the prudent,”¹³¹³ who rely chiefly on their suavity. And Christ says: “I confess to Thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because Thou hast hid these things [the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven] from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them to little ones.”¹³¹⁴

Consequently there are two mutually contradictory defects to be avoided: on the one hand, imprudence, lack of consideration, negligence in considering what one should, rash haste in judgment; and on the other hand, false prudence, or “the wisdom of the flesh,”¹³¹⁵ often called slyness or even cunning, which pursues only a lower, quite earthly end. It seeks, not the honest good, the object of virtue, but the useful good such as money, and it displays much craft or trickery to procure this good for itself. Cunning is the cleverness of rogues; it will not help them to enter the kingdom of heaven. This false prudence is foolishness and a delusion, as St. Paul often says.¹³¹⁶

Imprudence, or lack of consideration, greatly retards spiritual progress, and often it retards it by trying to hasten it. This is the case with those who skim the road, who wish to reach divine union immediately without passing humbly through the indispensable lower degrees, as if a bird were to try to fly before having wings, or an architect to construct the spires of a church before laying its foundations. For example, these imprudent souls read mystical books too soon and too rapidly, with avidity and in a superficial way, without applying themselves to the serious practice of virtue. They examine superficially the most beautiful aspects of the spiritual life and will perhaps never nourish their souls with them. It is as if they gathered from a fruit tree the flowers which should give the fruit, unaware that by so doing they hinder the fruit from forming. Later, when they should read the great spiritual writers with profit, they will perhaps say that it is useless to do so since they have already read them and know them; when as a matter of fact they have only a lamentably superficial knowledge of them. Theirs is the imprudence of the foolish virgins, the lack of discretion in the spiritual life.

To avoid the mutually contradictory defects of imprudence and false prudence, it is important to consider what infused or Christian prudence should be and likewise what should characterize acquired prudence, which is at the service of infused prudence, as the imagination and memory are at the service of the intellect. To follow an ascending course, we shall first discuss acquired prudence, then infused prudence, and finally the gift of counsel.

ACQUIRED PRUDENCE AND SELF-CONTROL

Acquired prudence, which has for its object honest good, is a true virtue distinct from false prudence, or the wisdom of the flesh, which St. Paul speaks of. Acquired prudence is defined as *recta ratio agibilium*, right reason which directs our acts. It is called *auriga virtutum*, the driver of the moral virtues; in reality, it directs the acts of justice, fortitude, temperance, and the annexed virtues.¹³¹⁷ It determines the measure to be observed or the rational happy mean, which is also a summit, in the midst of and above every deviation that may be unreasonable through defect or excess. Thus prudence determines the happy mean of fortitude above cowardliness and temerity, which would lead us to expose our life without a reasonable motive. Aristotle spoke of *mesotes* (the happy mean) and *aerates* (the summit).¹³¹⁸

The virtue of acquired prudence, which was well described by Aristotle, proceeds under the light of natural reason and moral knowledge, making this rational light descend into our sensibility, our will, and all our activity. But to determine the reasonable happy mean in the different moral virtues, prudence presupposes these virtues, as the coachman needs well-broken horses.¹³¹⁹ There is a mutual relationship between the directing virtue and the others; they grow together. Let us not forget that no one can have true acquired prudence, distinct from cunning and artifice, if he has not in a proportionate degree justice, fortitude, temperance, loyalty, and true modesty. Why is this? Because, as the ancients used to say: “Such as a man is, such does the end seem to him.”¹³²⁰ The ambitious man judges as good what flatters his pride, whereas the sincerely modest man

loves to do good while remaining hidden. He who is dominated by ambition may have great cunning and subtlety; he cannot have true acquired prudence, nor, with even greater reason, infused prudence. Therefore St. Thomas says: "The truth of the practical intellect depends on conformity with a right appetite."¹³²¹ Moreover, prudence ought not only to judge well, but to command efficaciously the virtuous acts of justice, fortitude, and temperance, and it cannot command them in this way unless the will is upright and efficacious, rectified by these very virtues.¹³²² Thus there is truly a mutual relationship between prudence and the moral virtues which it directs; true acquired prudence cannot exist without the acquired virtues of justice, fortitude, and temperance. This rectitude of moral conduct is in itself something very beautiful.¹³²³

Consequently, in a man in the state of mortal sin, who sins seriously against justice, fortitude, temperance, or any other virtue, the virtue of acquired prudence can be only in the state of a slightly stable disposition (*facile mobilis*), for the will of this man is turned away from his last end.¹³²⁴ That the acquired virtue of prudence exist in the state of a stable virtue (*difficile mobilis*) and be in truth firmly connected with the other moral virtues, we must have charity; we must efficaciously love God, our last end, more than ourselves.¹³²⁵

Acquired prudence counsels us about many things which natural reason can know by its own power. It will preserve us from impulsiveness, dominate our temperament, tell us not to follow the fancies of our imagination, the whims of our sensible appetites. It will remind us that we must submit to the judgment of those who are more enlightened and experienced, that we must obey those who have authority to command. It will guide us in our dealings with different people by taking their temperament and character into consideration. But however perfect acquired prudence may be, since it belongs to the natural or rational order, it cannot by itself judge as it should the supernatural conduct to be observed in Christian life. For that judgment, we need infused prudence, which is that recommended by the Gospel.

INFUSED PRUDENCE

Infused prudence was given to us by baptism; it grows with charity, through merit, the sacraments, Communion. By itself it gives us an intrinsic facility to judge well and practically of the matters of Christian life, and its exercise is extrinsically facilitated by acquired prudence which is exercised at the same time. Infused prudence brings to the actions of our daily life the light of grace and of infused faith, as acquired prudence brings to them the light of right reason. In certain very sensible Christians, acquired prudence is especially prominent; in others, who are more supernatural, infused prudence is particularly manifest. Consequently, infused prudence is a great virtue, superior to all the moral virtues which it directs; it should evidently be found especially in those whose duty is to advise and direct others.

We are not concerned here, therefore, with that negative prudence which, to avoid difficulties and vexations, almost always advises against acting, against undertaking great things. This prudence, which has as its principle: "Undertake nothing," is that of cowardly souls. After saying: "The best is sometimes the enemy of the good," it ends by declaring: "The best is often the enemy of the good." Such negative prudence confounds the mediocre with the happy mean of the moral virtue, which is also a summit above contrary vices. Mediocrity itself is an unstable mean between good and evil; it is that with which tepidity contents itself, seeking always for pardon by speaking of moderation and stating its first principle: "Nothing must be exaggerated." Then follows forgetfulness of the fact that in the way of God, not to advance is to retrogress; not to ascend is to descend; for the law of the traveler is to advance, and not to fall asleep on the road. True Christian prudence is not a negative but a positive virtue, which leads a man to act as he should when he should, and which never loses sight of the elevation of our supernatural last end, nor of zeal for the glory of God and the salvation of souls. It definitively rejects certain human maxims.

If acquired prudence presupposes the acquired moral virtues, Christian prudence presupposes the infused moral virtues which accompany charity. And if, in the first training, more insistence is placed on these virtues, especially on humility, chastity, and patience, than on prudence itself, it is because the humble, chaste, and patient man is inclined by these very virtues to judge well and practically (*per modum inclinationis*) of what relates to moral and spiritual life. But when the Christian, who is already more or less trained, must begin to direct himself, he should in many things, especially if he must counsel others, be particularly attentive to what true supernatural prudence demands, and avoid all lack of consideration and rash haste in judgment. Then he will become increasingly aware of the superiority of true Christian prudence, a virtue which ranks immediately below the theological virtues, that it may cause their radiation and vivifying influence to descend on the moral virtues which it directs.

Therefore Christian prudence should grow with charity, and its supernatural views should increasingly prevail over the too human views of what St. Thomas, following the example of St. Augustine, calls the "lower reason." The lower reason judges everything from the temporal point of view; the higher reason, from the point of view of eternity.¹³²⁶

This lofty Christian prudence is exceedingly rare. Father Lallemant, S.J., even says: "The majority of religious, even of the good and virtuous, follow in their own conduct and in their direction of others only reason and common sense, in which some of them excel. This rule is good, but it does not suffice to attain Christian perfection. Such persons are ordinarily guided in

their conduct by the common opinion of those with whom they live, and as the latter are imperfect, although their lives may not be dissolute, because the number of the perfect is very small, they never reach the sublime ways of the spirit. They live like the common run of people, and their manner of directing others is imperfect.”¹³²⁷ At certain times, for instance during persecutions, the inadequacy of such a way of acting becomes evident.

True prudence never loses sight of the elevation of the end toward which we should journey; it judges all our acts in relation to eternal life, and not only in relation to the customs or conventions of our environment. It repeatedly calls to mind “the one thing necessary.” Aided by the special inspirations of the gift of counsel,¹³²⁸ it becomes holy discretion which weighs all things according to God’s measure.

HOLY DISCRETION AND THE GIFT OF COUNSEL

St. Catherine of Siena offers an admirable treatise on discretion or spiritual discernment in her *Dialogue*. She tells us that Christian discretion, which indicates the measure between the contrary defects and is the source of a wise discernment, is based on the knowledge of God and of self. She states: “Discretion is the only child of self-knowledge and, wedding with charity, has indeed many other descendants, as a tree with many branches; but that which gives life to the tree, to its branches, and its fruit, is the ground of humility, in which it is planted, which humility is the foster-mother and nurse of charity, by whose means this tree remains in the perpetual calm of discretion.”¹³²⁹ This is a symbolical manner of expressing the connection of these virtues.

Holy discretion presupposes, therefore, a great spirit of faith. It lessens nothing; whereas practical naturalism sees only a limited aspect of great things, holy discretion sees the great aspect even of the little things in Christian life, of our daily duties in their relation to God.¹³³⁰ It directs justice, which renders to God and to one’s neighbor what is due them. As we read in *The Dialogue* (it is the Lord who speaks):

Discretion... renders to each one his due. Chiefly to Me in rendering praise and glory to My name, and in referring to Me the graces and the gifts which she sees and knows she has received from Me;¹³³¹ and rendering to herself that which she sees herself to have merited, knowing that she does not even exist of herself.... And she seems to herself to be ungrateful for so many benefits, and negligent, in that she has not made the most of her time, and the graces she has received, and so seems to herself worthy of suffering; wherefore she becomes odious and displeasing to herself through her guilt.¹³³² And this founds the virtue of discretion on knowledge of self, that is, on true humility, for, were this humility not in the soul, the soul would be indiscreet; indiscretion being founded on pride, as discretion is on humility.

An indiscreet soul robs Me of the honor due to Me, and attributes it to herself through vainglory, and that which is really her own she imputes to Me, grieving and murmuring concerning My mysteries, with which I work in her soul and those of My other creatures; wherefore everything in Me and in her neighbor is cause of scandal to her. Contrariwise those who possess the virtue of discretion. For when they have rendered what is due to Me and to themselves, they proceed to render to their neighbor their principal debt of love and of humble and continuous prayer, which all should pay to each other and further, the debt of doctrine, and example of a holy and honorable life, counseling and helping others according to their needs for salvation.¹³³³

Holy discretion is thus the light which rules the virtues; it measures the acts of exterior penance and those of devotion to our neighbor, at the same time reminding us that our love of God should be without measure and should always grow here on earth.¹³³⁴

Far from being a negative virtue, holy discretion is, in the service of charity, the virtue which holds the reins of the moral life, directing justice, fortitude, and temperance, that we may persevere in good, that we may make God known and loved. Christian prudence thus preserves with charity the connection of all the virtues.

When this great Christian prudence is enlightened by the special inspirations of the gift of counsel, which corresponds to it, it is, as our Lord insists it should be, in accordance with “the simplicity of the dove,” with perfect uprightness—not at all naivete—which keeps silence about what must not be said, but never speaks against the truth. A man must be master of his tongue and know how to cultivate his character.

The gift of counsel comes to the assistance of prudence especially in difficult and unforeseen circumstances, sometimes to unite in one and the same word or gesture seemingly contradictory virtues, as firmness and meekness, or again veracity and fidelity in keeping a secret.

According to St. Augustine and St. Thomas,¹³³⁵ the gift of counsel corresponds to the beatitude of the merciful for two reasons: first of all, mercy is necessary for us to know how to give fitting salutary counsel to those who need it, counsel which truly carries, which does not rebuff souls but lifts them up again with strength and sweetness. In the second place, when prudence hesitates in difficult circumstances between the rigor of justice to be observed and mercy, which should not be forgotten, the gift of counsel generally inclines us toward mercy which will encourage the sinner and perhaps make him re-enter the order of justice. He will at times enter it with a sincere and profound contrition, thus repairing the order that he violated, far better than by bearing the punishment with less love. Consequently the loftiness of infused prudence is manifest; but we shall see it even more clearly in our discussion of Christian simplicity, which should always be united to prudence.

Even now we grasp the importance of Christ’s words: “Who, thinkest thou, is a faithful and wise servant, whom his lord hath appointed over his family, to give them meat in season? Blessed is that servant, whom when his lord shall come he shall find

so doing. Amen I say to you, he shall place him over all his goods.”^{[1336](#)} These words are applied to every faithful and prudent Christian, especially to those who must advise others, to heads of families, to pastors, to bishops, to great popes. They will receive a high reward, to which allusion is made in Ecclesiasticus,^{[1337](#)} where we read the praise of the wisdom and prudence of the patriarchs, and in the prophecy of Daniel where it is said: “But they that are learned [in the wisdom of God and faithful to His law] shall shine as the brightness of the firmament: and they that instruct many to justice, as stars for all eternity.”^{[1338](#)} Let us remember that false prudence is tin, true acquired prudence is silver, infused prudence is gold, and the inspirations of the gift of counsel are diamonds, of the same order as the divine light. “He that followeth Me walketh not in darkness, but shall have the light of life.”^{[1339](#)}

The Different Forms of Justice and the Education of the Will

“Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after justice.”

Matt. 5:6

Among the four cardinal virtues of prudence, justice, fortitude, and temperance, there is one, namely justice, which pious people do not consider sufficiently. They are attentive to the different forms of temperance, to prudence to be observed in the general conduct of life; they try to practice charity toward their neighbor, but they sometimes neglect certain duties of justice and consideration for the rights of others. Those, for example, who persecuted St. John of the Cross called themselves men of prayer and austerity, yet they were most unjust toward the reformer of Carmel.

If man practiced the different forms of justice more perfectly, he would make great progress in training his will. Justice, in fact, is in that faculty to make it leave egoism or self-love,¹³⁴⁰ as prudence is in the intellect to oppose lack of consideration, and as fortitude and temperance are in the sensible appetites to strengthen them against fear and inordinate concupiscences.¹³⁴¹ For this reason these four virtues are called cardinal virtues. They are like hinges on which the doors turn that give access to the moral life.¹³⁴² Some souls, while given to anger, are so cowardly that they seem to have lost all will; indeed this faculty seems to have disappeared, leaving only self-love or egoism. The reason is that the will is considerably weakened when it is deprived of the acquired and infused virtues which should be in it. On the other hand, a will enriched by these virtues is increased more than tenfold.

We should remember that the four forms of justice, which we are going to discuss, should be in the will and, above them, the virtues of religion, hope, and charity. Thus the training or Christian education of the will and character should be made. Character should be the authentic imprint of reason illumined by faith and of moral energy, a mark stamped on the physical temperament, whether nervous, irascible, lymphatic, or sanguine, hyperthyroid or hypothyroid, in order that this temperament may cease to dominate, and that the Christian may truly appear as a rational being and still more as a child of God.

Consequently, for this Christian education of the will, we shall discuss the different forms of justice, to which correspond several precepts of the Decalogue. After our duties toward God, they determine those we should practice toward our parents and toward all persons with whom we have relations: “Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor’s goods. Thou shalt not bear false witness,” and so on. We may transgress these precepts in many different ways when we forget in practice that we should not do to others what we do not wish them to do to us.¹³⁴³

People often think of justice only in the inferior form known as commutative justice, which governs exchanges and forbids theft, fraud, calumny, and so forth. They do not sufficiently consider distributive justice,¹³⁴⁴ which presides over the distribution by authority of the advantages and duties of social life among the different members of society. In view of the common good, it distributes to each as it should goods, work, duties, obligations, rewards, and penalties; this distribution should be made in proportion to merit, real needs, and the importance of the different members of society. Even more do people forget a higher form of justice, which aims immediately at the common good of society and brings about the establishment and observance of just laws and ordinances; this form of justice is called legal justice.¹³⁴⁵ Above it there is equity, which considers not only the letter but the spirit of laws, and that not only of civil laws, but of all those that govern Christian conduct.¹³⁴⁶

The interior life should watch over the exercise of these virtues. Here also the acquired virtue of justice is at the service of the infused virtue of the same name, somewhat as the imagination is at the service of reason.¹³⁴⁷

COMMUTATIVE AND DISTRIBUTIVE JUSTICE IN RELATION TO THE INTERIOR LIFE

The duties of justice appear in a living and concrete fashion when we think of faults against it which should be avoided, for the sorrow that injustice causes us reveals to us the value of justice. The faults and acts contrary to commutative justice are not only homicide, theft, fraud, usury, false accusations and false witness in a lawsuit; they are also insults given in anger, affronts, unjust blame or reproaches against inferiors, equals, and superiors. Also included are defamation, slander, or speaking ill of another without a proportionate motive; also secret insinuation by whispering, mockery which lessens the esteem due to our neighbor,¹³⁴⁸ forgetfulness of the truth that our neighbor has a right to his reputation and that he needs it to do good, to such an extent, says St. Thomas, that the perfect should, not for their own sakes, but for the good to be done to others, resist their detractors.¹³⁴⁹

When commutative justice has been violated in one or another of these ways, restitution or reparation becomes a duty. Thus we must repair the wrong that we have done our neighbor by slander or insinuations or mockery which show we do not regard him as he deserves.¹³⁵⁰ Besides it is cowardly to ridicule someone who cannot defend himself, or the absent who cannot reply.

The defect opposed to distributive justice is undue respect of persons. We may indeed prefer one person to another and gratuitously give more to one than to another. But the sin of undue respect of persons consists in unjustly preferring one person to another, taking from the latter something that is due him. This sin is more grave in the spiritual order than in the temporal order: for example, if we are more attentive to the exterior condition of persons, to their wealth, than to their merits, and if we refuse them the respect which is due them or the spiritual helps which they need.¹³⁵¹

Interior souls should be particularly watchful on this point and on guard not to slight the friends of God, the saints whom the Lord has chosen for Himself from the humblest stations in life. Injustice is at times the portion of very patient servants of God because everyone knows that they will not complain and will put up with everything. This was often the lot of St. Benedict Joseph Labre because people failed to see the heart of a great saint under the rags of a beggar. On the contrary, clear-sighted souls should sense or divine sanctity in their neighbor, even though it be under the most humble exterior. Moreover, it is a great reward and a great joy to discover sanctity. It must have been a great consolation to verify the sanctity of Benedict Joseph Labre by seeing how he bore insults and blows, when, for example, he kissed the stone which had been thrown at him and had drawn his blood.

LEGAL JUSTICE, EQUITY, AND THE FORMATION OF CHARACTER

Above commutative justice and distributive justice is legal or social justice, which should have a lofty form in the Christian and in interior souls. This virtue is concerned, not directly with the rights of individuals, but with the common good of society, and not only of civil society but of that spiritual society, the Church, and the different groups in it. Legal justice leads a man to observe perfectly the laws or constitutions of the society to which he belongs. This virtue inclines the Christian to learn about the laws to be observed and the instructions of the Supreme Pastor, about his encyclicals on present-day questions. The reading and study of these encyclicals are often neglected to the detriment of all. Social justice should give us an understanding of the common good; it combats individualism, which is one form of egoism.

Social justice disposes us to devote ourselves in generous self-forgetfulness to the general good, and, if necessary, to sacrifice our time, comfort, or personal satisfaction to it. Were we to act otherwise, we would live on the common good like parasites, instead of contributing to promote and maintain it. We receive much from society and to it we are indebted. If we fail in our obligation, we are like mistletoe, which lives on the oak tree at the tree's expense, sometimes causing its death. Society in general, indeed every social group, has its parasites. To react against this vice (into which a man might fall by trying to live like a hermit and being indifferent to the common good), we must perform the duties of legal justice and devote ourselves to the general good, mindful of its superiority. From this point of view, love of our rule, of the holy laws established in the Church, is a great virtue which protects the soul against many disorders.¹³⁵²

Lastly, above legal or social justice there is equity.¹³⁵³ This form of justice is attentive not only to the letter of the law, but especially to its spirit, to the intention of the legislator. As it considers chiefly the spirit of laws, it does not interpret them with excessive rigor, in a mechanical and material manner, but with a superior understanding, especially in certain special circumstances in which, according to the intention of the legislator, it would not be advisable to apply the letter of the law, for then the adage would be verified: "Summum jus est summa injuria." The strict law in all its rigor would then be an injustice and an injury, because the particularly difficult and distressing exceptional circumstances in which the person involved might be placed would not be taken into account.¹³⁵⁴

Equity, which preserves us from Pharisaism and from the juridical formalism of many jurists, is thus the highest form of justice; it is more conformable to wisdom and to great common sense than to the written law.¹³⁵⁵ It has in view, over and above the text of the laws, the real exigencies of the general good and inclines one to treat men with the respect due to human dignity. This is a capital point; its importance is grasped only as one grows older. Equity is a great virtue, whence the expression: It is just and equitable to do this, for example, to practice benevolence toward a dying enemy, toward wounded prisoners of war who need help. Equity has thus some resemblance to charity, which is superior to it.

If we were attentive to these four kinds of justice that should be practiced, we would obviate many conflicts between persons, between classes, between the different groups that ought to labor at one work under the direction of God. These virtues, which are subordinated to charity, would also considerably increase the strength of our will; by withdrawing it from egoism and rectifying it, they would increase its energies more than tenfold. This point should be considered in connection with the Christian education of character, which should succeed in dominating our physical temperament and which should stamp it in the image of reason illumined by faith. As a matter of fact, the acquired virtues cause the rectitude of right reason to descend into the very depths of the will, and the infused virtues bring to it the rectitude of faith and the very life of grace, a participation

in the inner life of God.

JUSTICE AND CHARITY

With a better knowledge of the loftiness of justice under its different forms, we see more clearly the relations to charity which should vivify it from above.

These two virtues have in common the fact that they regulate good relations with others. But they differ from each other: justice prescribes that we give to each man his due and allow him to use it according to his right. Charity is the virtue by which we love God above all else, and our neighbor as ourselves for the love of God. Therefore it goes far beyond respect for the right of others, in order to make us treat other human beings like brothers in Christ, whom we love like other selves in the love of God.¹³⁵⁶

In brief, as St. Thomas well shows, justice considers our neighbor another person, in that he is a distinct person; charity considers him as another self. Justice respects the rights of another, charity gives over and above these rights for the love of God and of the child of God. To pardon means to give over and beyond.

We can thus see why, as St. Thomas says, "Peace (which is the tranquillity of order in the union of wills) is the work of justice indirectly, in so far as justice removes the obstacles to peace (such as wrongs, injuries); but it is the work of charity directly, since charity, according to its very nature, causes peace. For love is a unitive force...; and peace is the union of the appetites' inclinations."¹³⁵⁷

THE VIRTUES CONNECTED WITH JUSTICE IN CHRISTIAN LIFE

Justice, thus vivified by charity, is accompanied by several other virtues that resemble it. Among them, there is one superior to justice, the virtue of religion, which renders to God the worship due Him, interior and exterior worship, devotion (or promptness of the will in the service of God), prayer, sacrifice of adoration, of reparation, of supplication, of thanksgiving. This virtue is opposed to irreligion, or impiety, and also to superstition. It reminds us at the same time of the worship of *dulia* due to the saints and that of *hyperdulia* due to the Mother of God. Thus religion is inferior to the theological virtues. To religion penance should be united to make reparation for offenses against God.

To justice are also attached filial piety toward parents and one's country, the respect due to merit, to age, to the dignity of persons, obedience to superiors, gratitude for favors received, vigilance in punishing justly when necessary at the same time using clemency, lastly veracity in speech and in one's manner of living and acting. Veracity, which is a virtue, differs from frankness, a simple inclination of temperament, which sometimes borders on insolence and which forgets that not every truth is to be told.

Justice reminds us that besides strict justice there are the rights and duties of friendship (*jus amicabile*), in regard to those who are more closely united to us. In respect to people in general, there are also the duties of amiability, which is opposed to adulation and to litigation or useless dispute. Lastly, there are the duties of liberality, which avoids both avarice and prodigality.

All these different forms of justice are of great importance in the conduct of life. At times pious people do not think sufficiently about them; they put on the airs of a hermit more egoistically than virtuously. Under the pretext of charity and the prompting of bitter zeal, they may even fail in charity and justice through rash judgment, slander, insinuation against their neighbor.

If, on the contrary, a man practiced generously the virtues we have just spoken of, his will would be greatly rectified and fortified, better disposed to live by the still higher virtues of hope and charity, which should unite him to God and preserve this union with God in the midst of the varied circumstances of life, even of the most painful and unforeseen. To show oneself a Christian, even in the smallest acts of life, is the true happiness of him who follows Christ.

St. Thomas described the eminent degree of the infused cardinal virtues when he wrote: "Prudence by contemplating the things of God, counts as nothing all things of the world, and directs all the thoughts of the soul toward God alone. Temperance, as far as nature allows, neglects the needs of the body; fortitude prevents the soul from being afraid of neglecting the body and rising to heavenly things; and justice consists in the soul giving a whole-hearted consent to follow the way thus proposed."¹³⁵⁸ These are the perfecting virtues; higher still, according to St. Thomas,¹³⁵⁹ are the virtues of the fully purified soul, "the perfect virtues.... Such are the virtues attributed to the blessed, or, in this life, to some who are at the summit of perfection."

Thereby we see the grandeur of the virtue of justice, which is the second cardinal virtue. It is superior to fortitude, to temperance, and even to virginity. Justice is often no more than an empty word for some souls; then injustice which must at times be borne reminds them of the real value of justice. This great reality appears especially in the evangelical beatitude: "Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after justice: for they shall have their fill." The justice mentioned here is the highest degree of justice, containing eminently all that we have just said.

Chapter 10

Patience and Meekness

“In your patience you shall possess your souls.”
Luke 21:19

In the difficult periods through which we have to pass, we should remember what our Lord has told us about the virtue of fortitude, which is necessary that we may not be frightened by any menace, or arrested in the way of salvation by any obstacle. We shall treat here especially of the virtue of patience, which is the most frequent form under which fortitude of soul is exercised in the vexations of life. In the Christian it should be united to meekness, and in such a way that those who are naturally meek may learn to become strong, and those who are naturally inclined to the virtue of fortitude may become meek with the meaning given to the term by the evangelical beatitude: “Blessed are the meek.” Thus both will ascend toward the same summit, although by different paths. To make this teaching clear, we shall discuss first of all the virtue of patience, then that of meekness, both of which are in the service of charity.

PATIENCE AND LONGANIMITY, TWIN COLUMNS OF THE INTERIOR LIFE

“Charity is patient.”
I Cor. 13:4

Patience, says St. Thomas,¹³⁶⁰ is a virtue attached to the virtue of fortitude, which hinders a man from departing from right reason illumined by faith by yielding to difficulties and to sadness. It makes him bear the evils of life with equanimity of soul, says St. Augustine,¹³⁶¹ without allowing himself to be troubled by vexations. The impatient man, no matter how violent he may be, is a weak man; when he raises his voice and murmurs, he really succumbs from the moral point of view. The patient man, on the contrary, puts up with an inevitable evil in order to remain on the right road, to continue his ascent toward God. Those who bear adversity that they may attain what their pride desires, have not the virtue of patience but only its counterfeit, hardness of heart.

By patience the soul truly possesses itself above the fluctuations of the sensible part depressed by sadness.¹³⁶² The martyrs are in the highest degree masters of themselves and free. In patience is met again something of the principal act of the virtue of fortitude: the enduring of painful things without weakening. It is more difficult and meritorious, says St. Thomas, to endure for a long time what keenly vexes nature than to attack an adversary in a moment of enthusiasm.¹³⁶³ It is more difficult for a soldier to hold out for a long time under a shower of bullets in a cold damp trench than with all the ardor of his temperament to take part in an attack. If the virtue of fortitude bears the blows that may cause death, as we see in the soldier who dies for his country and still more in the martyr who dies for the faith, the virtue of patience endures unflinchingly the contradictions of life.¹³⁶⁴ Thus we see that this virtue of patience is the guardian of other virtues; it protects them against the disorders that impatience would cause; it is like a buttress of the spiritual edifice.

Some years ago Americanism spoke rather disdainfully of the so-called passive virtues of patience, humility, and obedience. A good writer replied that they are the twin columns of the moral and spiritual life.

To have patience as a solid virtue, man must be in the state of grace and have charity, which prefers God to everything else, no matter what the cost. For this reason St. Paul says: “Charity is patient.”¹³⁶⁵

If the contradictions of life last for a long time without interruption, as happens in the case of a person forced to live with someone who continually tantalizes him, then there is need of longanimity, a special virtue resembling patience. It is called longanimity because of the length of the trial, the duration of the suffering, the insults, all that must be borne for months and years.

As St. Francis de Sales points out,¹³⁶⁶ patience makes us preserve equanimity of mind in the midst of the variableness of the divers mishaps of this mortal life. “Let us frequently call to mind,” he says, “that as our Lord has saved us by patient sufferings, so we also ought to work out our salvation by sufferings and afflictions, enduring injuries and contradictions, with all possible meekness.... Some are unwilling to suffer any tribulations but those that are honorable: for example, to be wounded in battle.... Now these people do not love the tribulation, but the honor wherewith it is accompanied; whereas he that is truly patient suffers indifferently tribulation, whether accompanied by ignominy or honor. To be despised, reprehended, or accused by wicked men, is pleasant to a man of good heart; but to suffer blame and ill treatment from the virtuous, or from our friends and relations, is the test of true patience.... The evils we suffer from good men are much more insupportable than those we suffer

from others.”¹³⁶⁷

To practice this virtue in a manner that is not stoic but Christian, we should often recall the patience of Christ on the cross, which surpasses human thought. For love of us He endured the most severe physical and moral sufferings, which came to Him from the fury of the priests of the Synagogue, from abandonment by His people, from the ingratitude of His own, from the divine malediction due to sin, which He willed to bear in our place as a voluntary victim. May the patience of our Savior preserve our souls according to the words of St. Paul: “And the Lord direct your hearts, in the charity of God and the patience of Christ.”¹³⁶⁸ As a German proverb says, patience yields roses and ends by obtaining all: “Geduld bringt rosen.”

When we have to practice this virtue in prolonged trials, we should remember the teaching of the saints, that sufferings well borne are like materials which compose the edifice of our salvation. Sufferings are the portion of the children of God in this life and a sign of predestination: “Through many tribulations we must enter into the kingdom of God,” we are told in the Acts of the Apostles.¹³⁶⁹ It is essential to know how to suffer calmly without excessive self-pity. Those who share most in the sufferings of Christ will be most glorified with Him.¹³⁷⁰ Sometimes an act of great patience before death is sufficient; this is the case of many dying persons who are reconciled to God a few days or hours before their last breath.

SUPERNATURAL MEEKNESS AND ITS FRUITS

“Charity is kind.”

I Cor 13:14

Meekness, or gentleness, should accompany patience from which it differs in that it has as its special effect, not the endurance of the vexations of life but the curbing of the inordinate movements of anger.¹³⁷¹ The virtue of meekness differs from meekness of temperament inasmuch as, in widely diverse circumstances, it imposes the rectitude of reason illumined by faith on the sensibility more or less disturbed by anger. This virtue is superior to meekness of temperament, as the virtue of chastity is to the laudable natural inclination called modesty; similarly, the virtue of mercy is superior to sensible pity. Meekness of temperament is exercised with facility toward those who please us and is rather frequently accompanied by ill-temper toward others. The virtue of meekness does away with this bitterness toward all persons and in the most varied circumstances. Moreover, into a just severity that is necessary at times, the virtue injects a note of calmness, as clemency mitigates merited punishment. Meekness, like temperance to which it is united, is the friend of the moderation or the measure which causes the light of reason and that of grace to descend into the more or less troubled sensible appetites.¹³⁷² This is so in true martyrs.

Meekness thus conceived should reign not only in our words and conduct, but also in our hearts; otherwise it is only an artifice. As St. Francis de Sales points out, when it is inspired by a supernatural motive and practiced even toward those who are acrimonious, meekness is the flower of charity. “Charity is kind,” says St. Paul. The flower is the most beautiful visible part of a plant, that which most draws our gaze, and in spite of its fragility, it has a very important role: it protects the fruit which is forming in it.

Similarly meekness is that which is most visible and most agreeable in the practice of charity; it is what constitutes its charm. It appears in the gaze, the smile, the bearing, the speech; it doubles the value of a service rendered. And besides, it protects the fruits of charity and zeal; it makes counsels and even reproaches acceptable. In vain will we have zeal for our neighbor, if we are not meek; we appear not to love him and we lose the benefit of our good intentions, for we seem to speak through passion rather than reason and wisdom, and consequently we accomplish nothing.

Meekness is particularly meritorious when practiced toward those who make us suffer; then it can only be supernatural, without any admixture of vain sensibility. It comes from God and sometimes has a profound effect on our neighbor who is irritated against us for no good reason. Let us remember that the prayer of St. Stephen called down grace on the soul of Paul, who was holding the garments of those who stoned the first martyr. Meekness disarms the violent.

St. Francis de Sales, who loves analogies taken from nature, remarks: “Nothing so soon appeases the enraged elephant as the sight of a little lamb, and nothing so easily breaks the force of a cannon shot as wool.”¹³⁷³ Thus at times Christian meekness, which inclines a man to present his right cheek when someone strikes him on the left, disarms the person who is irritated. He indeed is the bruised reed; if he is answered in the same tone, he will be completely broken; if he is answered with meekness, he will gradually revive.

St. Francis de Sales also declares: “It is better to make penitents through meekness than hypocrites through severity.” In his letters he reverts again and again to advice such as this: “Take care to practice well the humble meekness that you owe to everybody, for it is the virtue of virtues which our Lord greatly recommended to us;¹³⁷⁴ and if you should happen to violate it, do not be troubled, but with all confidence, get back on your feet in order to walk anew in peace and meekness as before.” Everyone knows that the Bishop of Geneva never tired of saying that more flies are caught with honey than with vinegar. Zeal is necessary, but it should be patient and meek.

We ought, consequently, to avoid bitter zeal, which sermonizes indiscriminately and which has brought about the failure of

many reforms in religious orders. Opposing this bitter zeal, which is not inspired by charity but by pride, St. John of the Cross used to say: "There where there is not sufficient love, put love in and you will reap love."¹³⁷⁵ We should also note that meekness, which is spoken of in the beatitude of the meek, corresponds, as St. Augustine and St. Thomas state, to the gift of piety.¹³⁷⁶ This gift inspires in us, as a matter of fact, an entirely filial affection toward God; it makes us consider Him more and more as a very loving Father, and consequently it makes us see in men, not strangers, nondescript people or rivals, but brothers, that is, children of our common Father.¹³⁷⁷ The gift of piety makes us say more profoundly both for ourselves and for others: "Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name, Thy kingdom come...." We desire that the kingdom of God may take more profound possession of us and of our brethren, and this desire brings to our souls a great supernatural meekness which radiates on our neighbor. Indeed meekness, united to this gift of the Holy Ghost, is like the flower of charity.

To practice this virtue well, we should consider it in our Lord. His meekness is manifestly supernatural, springing from zeal for the salvation of souls; instead of diminishing zeal, meekness protects its fruits.

Isaias had announced the Savior, saying: "Neither shall His voice be heard abroad. The bruised reed He shall not break, and smoking flax He shall not quench."¹³⁷⁸ In response to Peter's query as to how often he should pardon his brother, Christ said: "I say not to thee, till seven times; but till seventy times seven times."¹³⁷⁹ He willed to be called "the Lamb of God... who taketh away the sin of the world."¹³⁸⁰ At His baptism the Holy Ghost descended upon Him in the form of a dove, another symbol of meekness.¹³⁸¹ Finally, on the cross He pardoned His executioners while praying for them; it is the smile of meekness in the supreme act of fortitude: the smile of the Crucified is the highest expression of goodness on earth.

Often martyrs, like St. Stephen while he was being stoned, followed the example of Jesus and prayed for their executioners. This very great supernatural meekness is one of the signs by which true martyrs are distinguished from the false. False martyrs die for their own ideas or opinions and through pride rebel against suffering; they may be aided in this by the spirit of evil. The connection or harmony of outwardly contradictory virtues is not manifest in them; their fortitude, which is stubbornness, is not accompanied by meekness. True martyrs, on the contrary, practice meekness even toward their executioners and often pray for them, following the example of Jesus. To forget one's own sufferings in order thus to think of the salvation of one's persecutors, of the good of their souls, is a sign of the highest charity and of all the virtues that are harmonized in it.

Let us often, in practice, ask our Lord for the virtue of meekness united to humility of heart. Let us ask Him for it at the moment of Communion, in that intimate contact of our soul with His, of our intellect and heart with His intellect illumined by the light of glory and His heart overflowing with charity. Let us ask Him for it by spiritual communion that is frequently renewed and, whenever the occasion presents itself, let us practice these virtues effectively and generously.

Then we shall see the realization of the words of the Master:

"Take up My yoke upon you and learn of Me, because I am meek and humble of heart; and you shall find rest to your souls."¹³⁸² We shall find rest for our souls; to know to what extent, we must experience it at a time of trouble and vexation. We should then make a more profound act of humility and meekness, pardoning fully those who have offended or wounded us, and we shall see how true are Christ's words. Our soul will thus take its right place in relation to God and our neighbor; with the help of grace it will be more profoundly restored to order, and it will recover the tranquillity of order, if not joy, at least the interior peace of an upright conscience united to God. We shall thus find peace in love, not the peace which the world can give, but that which comes from God. The peace which the world gives is wholly exterior; it is peace with the spirit of the world, with the enemies of God, with our evil inclinations; consequently it is interior disagreement with good people and with ourselves; it is the death of the soul. If there is any apparent tranquillity in us, it is that of death which hides decomposition and corruption.

The peace which the Lord gives is above all interior, and we cannot have it without incessant war against our inordinate passions, our pride and concupiscences, against the spirit of the world and the devil. For this reason our Lord, who brings us interior peace, says also: "I came not to send peace, but the sword."¹³⁸³ How, in fact, can we be humble and meek toward all without doing violence to ourselves? Then we have war on the frontiers of our soul, but peace reigns within. In spite of the demands of God's love, we experience that His yoke is sweet and His burden light. The weight of His burden diminishes with the progress of patience, humility, and meekness, which are, as it were, forms of the love of God and of neighbor in the sense in which St. Paul says: "Charity is patient, is kind; charity envieth not, dealeth not perversely; is not puffed up;... is not provoked to anger, thinketh no evil;... rejoiceth with the truth; beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things. Charity never falleth away."¹³⁸⁴

It is truly eternal life begun like a prelude of unending beatitude.¹³⁸⁵

The Value of Chastity and Its Spiritual Fruitfulness

We have discussed prudence, justice, fortitude, and patience, which are all united to meekness. We must now consider what temperance should be in us, especially under the form in which we most need to practice it, namely, that of chastity, which corresponds to that of the beatitude: “Blessed are the clean of heart.” We shall first consider this virtue in the most general manner, as it should be practiced in every condition or type of life, including Christian marriage. To proceed with order, we shall speak of the value of this virtue, of the motive which ought to inspire it. We shall then see its spiritual fruitfulness, especially when it is practiced under its highest form, virginity.¹³⁸⁶

THE MOTIVE THAT SHOULD INSPIRE CHASTITY

Chastity, says St. Thomas, is not simply that laudable natural disposition called modesty, a happy inclination, fearful by nature, which, through its very fear of evil, protects the soul against the disorders of concupiscence. Modesty, no matter how laudable, is not a virtue; it is only a natural good disposition. Chastity is a virtue and, as the name virtue indicates, it is a power. The acquired virtue of chastity, as it appeared in the Vestals, causes the light of right reason to descend into the occasionally disturbed and troubled sensibility. Infused chastity, received at baptism, causes the light of grace to descend into the sensible part of the soul; it makes use of acquired chastity somewhat as the intellect makes use of the imagination. They are exercised together; acquired chastity is thus at the service of infused chastity.¹³⁸⁷ Virginity is a still higher virtue, for it offers to God for a whole lifetime the integrity of body and heart which it consecrates to Him. It resembles simple chastity, says St. Thomas, as munificence resembles liberality, since it offers a splendid gift, absolute integrity.¹³⁸⁸ According to St. Cyprian and St. Ambrose, it gives the Church a particular splendor¹³⁸⁹ and contributes in giving it the luster of the mark of sanctity, to distinguish it from the sects which have renounced the evangelical counsels.

The value of chastity, whether that of virgins, widows, or married people, appears first of all by contrast with the disorders which spring from the concupiscence of the flesh, disorders which often bring in their wake divorce, family dishonor, the unhappiness of married couples and their children. We need only recall the divorce of Henry VIII of England, which drew practically the entire country into schism and then into heresy. To preserve us from similar errors, Christ says to all: “If thy right eye scandalize thee, pluck it out.... And if thy right hand scandalize thee, cut it off.... For it is expedient for thee that one of thy members should perish, rather than that thy whole body go into hell.”¹³⁹⁰

Chastity is lost through the exterior senses, the thoughts, the desires of the heart. It does not admit of any kind of forbidden pleasure. It retrenches even pleasures that are useless though permitted, and it leads man to live detached from them.

The motive that should inspire chastity is the love of God. Chastity of heart and body is in reality the renunciation of every illicit affection out of love of God. It prevents the life of the heart from descending, so that it may rise toward God like a living flame ever more pure and ardent. Chastity of the body is like bark around chastity of the heart, which is the more precious.

To preserve this virtue we must keep always spiritually close to Jesus crucified, as St. Francis de Sales says.¹³⁹¹ We cannot do this without a twofold mortification: that of the body and senses, especially as soon as danger arises, and that of the heart, by forbidding ourselves every inordinate affection. Such an affection would become not only useless, but harmful, and would start us down a perilous slope. It is only too easy for us to descend, and to slip much more rapidly than we foresee, and it is very difficult to reascend. People sometimes forge chains for themselves which later they lack the courage to break. They end by saying as worldings do: “Human love, if sincere, has undeniable rights.” To this we must answer: “There can be no rights contrary to the love due to God, the sovereign Good and Source of all truly generous love.”

On inordinate affections, *The Imitation* declares: “Whenever a man desireth anything inordinately, straightway he is disquieted within himself.... It is by resisting the passions therefore, and not by serving them, that true peace of heart is to be found. Peace, therefore, is... in the fervent and spiritual man.”¹³⁹² In the same work we read that excessive familiarity with people causes the soul to lose intimacy with our Lord. The author declares: “How foolish and vain, if thou desire anything out of Jesus! Is not this a greater loss to thee than if thou shouldst lose the whole world?... Whoever findeth Jesus, findeth a good treasure, a good above every good.... For His sake and in Him, let enemies as well as friends be dear to thee; and for all these thou must pray to Him that all may know and love Him.”¹³⁹³ The same sentiments are also expressed in the hymn, *Jesu, dulcis memoria* :

Quam pius es petentibus!
Quam bonus te quaerentibus!
Sed quid invenientibus!

To reach this close union with Christ, we must be humble and pure of heart; we must, as St. Francis de Sales says, always practice humility and chastity and, if possible, never or very rarely mention them.

THE SPIRITUAL FRUITFULNESS OF CHASTITY

Chastity practiced in its perfection makes man live in mortal flesh a spiritual life which is like the prelude of eternal life. Since it frees man from matter, it makes him in a manner like the angels. It even has for its effect to make his body increasingly like the soul, and the soul more and more like to God.

When the body lives only for the soul, it tends in fact to resemble it. The soul is a spiritual substance that can be seen immediately only by the spiritual gaze of God and the angels. It is simple because it has no extended parts; it is beautiful, especially when it keeps a continually upright intention, beautiful with the beauty of beautiful doctrines, of beautiful actions; it is calm, in the sense that it is above every corporeal movement; it is incorruptible or immortal because it is simple and immaterial, because it does not depend intrinsically on a perishable body.

By purity the body becomes spiritual, so to speak; from time to time it lets the soul shine through the gaze especially, like the look of a saint in prayer. By this virtue the body becomes simple: in proportion as the attitude of a worldly woman is complex, in the same proportion that of a virgin is simple. As someone has said: “There are two very simple beings: the child, who does not yet know evil; and the saint, who has forgotten it by dint of conquering it.” By purity the body grows beautiful, for all that is pure is beautiful: for example, an unclouded sky, a diamond through which light passes without any hindrance. Thus the bodies of the saints represented in the frescoes of Fra Angelico have a supernatural beauty which is that of a soul given entirely to God. By purity the body becomes calm and, in a certain way, even incorruptible; whereas vice withers, ravages, and kills the body prematurely, virginity preserves it.

Neither the body of our Lord nor that of the Blessed Virgin underwent the corruption of the tomb. Not infrequently the bodies of the saints remain intact, and long after their death sometimes exhale an exquisite odor, a sign of their perfect chastity. Their body, which lived only for the soul, still keeps its imprint. The Eucharist leaves, as it were, seeds of immortality in the body, which is destined to rise again and to receive a reflection of the glory of the soul. Christ tells us: “He that eateth My flesh and drinketh My blood, hath everlasting life; and I will raise him up in the last day.”¹³⁹⁴

Since perfect chastity renders the body like to the soul, it is even truer to say that it renders the soul like to God. The three attributes of God appropriated respectively to each of the divine Persons are power, wisdom, love. By perfect purity the soul becomes increasingly strong, luminous, and loving. Here especially appears the fruitfulness of this virtue.

By chastity the soul becomes strong. We have only to recall the courage of the virgin martyrs: St. Cecilia, St. Agnes, St. Catherine of Alexandria, St. Lucy of Syracuse, and many others. Their executioners tired more quickly of torturing them than they did of suffering. St. Lucy declared to her judges that a chaste and pious soul is the temple of the Holy Ghost. Upon this answer, they determined to profane her body by dragging her to a place of debauchery, but she remained rooted to the ground like a pillar of granite; the Holy Ghost kept her for Himself in spite of the efforts of her persecutors. The Lord gave these virgins an invincible strength which made them surmount every fear in the midst of the most severe torments. Though not miraculous, what strength, what moral authority perfect purity gives to religious in hospitals, in prisons, where they often gain the respect of poor perverted creatures who recognize in this virtue a superior power, that of the strong woman whom nothing weakens! For this reason particularly, the Virgin of virgins, the refuge of sinners and consoler of the afflicted, is terrible to the demons. She also bears the name of Mary Help of Christians or Our Lady of Perpetual Help. We may all hope in her power, which is full of goodness.

Likewise by purity the soul becomes luminous: “Blessed are the clean of heart: for they shall see God.” The Eagle of the Evangelists was a virgin, and so was St. Paul. St. Thomas, the greatest of theologians, was delivered at the age of sixteen from every temptation of the flesh that he might devote his entire life to the contemplation of divine things which he was to teach to others. Perfect purity also gives occasionally to Christian virgins, like Catherine of Alexandria and Catherine of Siena, a supernatural perception enabling them to see in a way even in this life the beauty of God, the sublime harmony of the apparently most contradictory divine perfections, such as God’s infinite justice and the tenderness of His mercy. These Christian virgins do not confound the good pleasure of God with arbitrariness; they do not argue about the mysteries of infallible Providence and of predestination, but if they touch upon them, they use exact expressions full of the spirit of faith. This clear vision of pure love has also enabled contemplatives and Christian virgins devoid of theological learning to write unforgettable pages on the spiritual beauty of Christ’s countenance, on the secret that unites in Him the most heroic fortitude and the most tender compassion, superabundant sadness and the loftiest serenity, the supreme demands of justice and the inexhaustible treasures of mercy. Only great wisdom knows what can be said and what remains inexpressible on this subject, a mystery that calls for the

silence of adoration.

Finally, perfect purity gives to the soul, together with supernatural light, a spiritual love of God and of our neighbor, which is truly the hundredfold and which compensates far in excess of all the sacrifices we have made or still have to make.

In a truly purified heart, the love of God becomes increasingly tender and strong. Far removed from all sentimentality, it rises above the sensibility; in the higher part of the spiritual will, it becomes that living flame of love spoken of by St. John of the Cross. It is the perfect realization of what the supreme precept demands: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart and with thy whole soul and with all thy strength and with all thy mind."¹³⁹⁵ Under certain touches of the Holy Ghost, the spiritual heart melts, as it were, into that of the Savior to draw from Him greater strength and ever new youth. In this love there is a savor of eternal life.

When the soul consecrated to God is wholly faithful, it merits the name of spouse of Christ. By the strength and tenderness of its love, it is associated with His sorrows, His immortal joys, His profound work in souls, His anticipated or definitive victories.

At the summit of this ascent, there is on earth between the consecrated soul and its God a spiritual marriage, an indissoluble union which transforms it into Him and enables it to say: "My beloved to me, and I to Him." This spiritual marriage is a profound intimacy, reaching at times even to the revelation of most secret thoughts. There are a thousand things which the faithful spouse of Christ divines and foresees. Between Christ and the soul there is perfect communion of ideas, sentiment, will, sacrifice, and action for the salvation of souls; and the reception of the Holy Eucharist each day with greater fervor, a fervor of the will, if not of the sensibility, is the daily testimony of this love.

This very pure and strong love of God and of souls in God is the source of a lofty spiritual paternity or maternity. To convince ourselves of this we need only recall the words of St. John the Evangelist to his children. Our Lord said to His apostles: "Little children, yet a little while I am with you."¹³⁹⁶ St. John says to his disciples: "My little children, these things I write to you," that you may not sin."¹³⁹⁷ "Your sins are forgiven you for His name's sake."¹³⁹⁸ "And now, little children, abide in Him, that when He shall appear we may... not be confounded by Him at His coming."¹³⁹⁹ "Let no man deceive you."¹⁴⁰⁰ "Let us not love in word nor in tongue, but in deed and in truth."¹⁴⁰¹ "You are of God, little children.... Greater is He that is in you, than he that is in the world."¹⁴⁰²

St. Paul speaks with the same fatherly tenderness and strength when he writes to the Galatians: "My little children, of whom I am in labor again, until Christ be formed in you.... I am ashamed for you."¹⁴⁰³ To the Corinthians he writes: [Shall I remind you of] my daily instance, the solicitude for all the churches. Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is scandalized, and I am not on fire?"¹⁴⁰⁴

Such is spiritual fatherhood in all its generosity, tenderness, and strength. It compensates far and beyond for the temporal fatherhood which the Apostle renounces. He does not found a definite and limited home where a life that will last sixty or eighty years is transmitted. He labors to form souls for our Lord, to communicate to them a life that will last forever.

Also worthy of admiration is the spiritual maternity of true religious, who, by increasing fidelity, deserve to be called spouses of Jesus Christ. They exercise this maternity toward abandoned children, the poor who have been forsaken by all, the sick who have no resources, suffering souls who are drifting away, and the agonizing. To such religious Christ will say: "I was thirsty, and you gave Me to drink;... I was hungry;... naked;... sick... in prison, and you came to Me.... Amen I say to you, as long as you did it to one of these My least brethren, you did it to Me."

Perfect purity renders the soul increasingly like to God, strong, luminous, loving, and makes man share in God's spiritual paternity, in that of the Savior, who came to found not a restricted family, but the great family of the Church which should extend to all peoples and to all generations. All this shows the grandeur of the evangelical counsel of chastity and of its effective practice.

The spirit of this counsel has on occasion also completely transfigured temporal fatherhood or motherhood. One of the greatest examples is that of St. Monica who, having given birth to Augustine, brought him forth spiritually by her tears and prayers. Monica thus obtained the conversion of her son; she became doubly his mother, of body and soul. All who are indebted to St. Augustine for the doctrine he taught should thank the mother to whom Ambrose said: "The son of so many tears could not perish."

To sum up, the moral virtue of chastity, when truly understood and practiced in a high degree, prepares the soul to receive the grace of contemplation, which proceeds from living faith illumined by the gifts. Then begins the realization of the promise: "Blessed are the clean of heart: for they shall see God." The truly pure soul begins, as it were, to see God in prayer, while uniting itself more intimately to the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, to the Consecration, and to Communion. It also begins to see divine Providence in the circumstances of life, for "to them that love God [and who persevere in this love], all things work together unto good." Finally, following this way, man begins to see God in the souls of those about him; gradually he sometimes discovers, under a thick and opaque envelope, a luminous soul that pleases God far more than he had first thought. Thus to see God in souls is a grace that must be merited. It requires a particular clear perception which is gradually obtained

by detachment from self and a more pure and strong love of God, which makes us discover in Him those who love Him and those who are called to love Him, those from whom we can receive and those to whom we can and should give for love of Him.

The Humility of Proficients

“The Son of man is not come to be ministered unto, but to minister and to give His life a redemption for many.”
Matt. 20:28

Since we are discussing here especially the moral virtues that have a special connection with the theological virtues and the life of union with God, we must consider what humility should be in proficients.

The importance and nature of this Christian virtue show clearly the distance which separates the acquired virtues described by the pagan philosophers from the infused virtues spoken of in the Gospel. In speaking of prudence, we recalled the distance between them, which is based on a distinction of nature. We shall get a clearer idea of this distance in speaking of humility, and even more in considering this virtue in our model, our Lord Jesus Christ.

Humility is considered in all Christian tradition as the foundation of the spiritual life, since it removes pride, which is, says Holy Scripture, the beginning of every sin because it separates us from God. Thus humility has often been compared to the excavation which must be dug for the erection of a building, an excavation which should be so much the deeper in proportion as the building is to be higher. From this point of view, as we have seen,¹⁴⁰⁵ the two principal pillars of the temple to be built are faith and hope, and its dome is charity.

Humility ought certainly to repress pride under all its forms, including intellectual and spiritual pride, which we have already discussed.¹⁴⁰⁶ But the principal, essential act and the highest act of humility is not, to be exact, the actual repression of movements of pride. It is evident, in fact, that in our Lord and in Mary there never was a first movement of pride to repress, and nevertheless there was in them and there still is the eminent exercise of the virtue of humility. What is, therefore, the essentially characteristic act of humility, first toward God, then toward our neighbor?

HUMILITY TOWARD GOD

The act proper to humility consists in bowing toward the earth, called *humus* in Latin, from which the name of this virtue is derived. To speak without metaphor, its essential act consists in abasing ourselves before God and adore what is of God in every creature. To abase ourselves before the Most High is to recognize, not only in a speculative but in a practical manner, our inferiority, littleness, and indigence, manifest in us even though we are innocent, and, once we have sinned, it consists in recognizing our wretchedness.

Thus humility is united to obedience and religion, but it differs from them. Obedience is concerned with the authority of God and His precepts; religion considers His excellence and the worship due Him. Humility, by inclining us toward the earth, recognizes our littleness, our poverty, and in its way glorifies the majesty of God. It sings His glory as when the archangel Michael said: “Who is like to God?” The interior soul experiences a holy joy in annihilating itself, as it were, before God to recognize practically that He alone is great and that, in comparison with His, all human greatness is empty of truth like a lie.

Humility thus conceived is based on truth, especially on the truth that there is an infinite distance between the Creator and the creature. The more this distance appears to us in a living and concrete manner, the more humble we are. However lofty the creature may be, this abyss is always infinite; and the higher we ascend, the more evident does this infinite abyss become for us. In this sense, the highest soul is the most humble, because the most enlightened: the Blessed Virgin Mary is more humble than all the saints, and our Lord is far more humble than His holy Mother.

We see the connection of humility with the theological virtues by determining its twofold dogmatic basis, which was unknown to the pagan philosophers. At its root are two dogmas. Primarily, it is based on the mystery of creation ex nihilo, which the philosophers of antiquity did not know, at least explicitly, but which reason can know by its natural powers. We have been created from nothing; this is the basis of humility according to the light of right reason.¹⁴⁰⁷

Humility is also based¹⁴⁰⁸ on the mystery of grace and on the necessity of actual grace for the slightest salutary act. This mystery exceeds the natural powers of reason; it is known by faith, and it is expressed in these words of the Savior: “Without Me you can do nothing”¹⁴⁰⁹ in the order of salvation.

From this principle spring four consequences in respect to God the Creator, to His providence and to His goodness, which is at once the source of grace and of the remission of sin.

First of all, in relation to God the Creator, we should recognize not only speculatively, but practically and concretely, that of ourselves we are nothing: “My substance is as nothing before Thee.”¹⁴¹⁰ “What hast thou that thou hast not received?”¹⁴¹¹ We

were created out of nothing by a sovereignly free *fiat* of God, by His love of benevolence, which preserves us in existence, without which we would be immediately annihilated. Furthermore, after creation, though there are a number of beings, there is no increase in reality, no increase of perfection, wisdom, or love; for before creation the infinite plenitude of divine perfection already existed. Therefore in comparison with God we are not.

If all that comes from God were taken away from even our best free acts, strictly speaking nothing would remain, for in such an act one part does not come from us and the other from God. The act is entirely from God as from its first cause, and it is entirely from us as from its second cause. Thus the fruit of a tree is entirely from God as from its first cause and entirely from the tree as from its second cause. We should recognize practically that without God, the Creator and Preserver of all things, we are nothing.

Secondly, in regard to Providence, without God the supreme Ordainer, without His providence which directs all things, our life completely lacks direction. We should, therefore, humbly receive from Him the general direction of the precepts that we may reach eternal life, and the particular direction that the Most High has chosen from all eternity for each one of us. This particular direction is manifested to us by our superiors, who are intermediaries between God and us, by counsels to which we should have recourse, by events, by the inspirations of the Holy Ghost. Consequently we should humbly accept the place, it may perhaps be very modest, which God has willed from all eternity for each one of us. Thus in the religious life, according to the divine will, some should be like the branches of the tree, others like flowers, others like roots hidden in the earth. Yet the root is most useful; it draws from the soil the secretions that constitute the sap necessary for the nourishment of the tree. If all its roots were cut, the tree would die; but it would not die were all its branches and flowers cut. Humility, which leads a Christian, a religious, to accept a hidden place very willingly, is extremely fruitful not only for himself but for others. Christ in His sorrowful life humbly wished the last place, that in which Barabbas was preferred to Him, the opprobrium of the cross; by so doing He became the corner stone in the edifice of the kingdom of God: "The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner. By the Lord this has been done; and it is wonderful in our eyes."¹⁴¹² St. Paul wrote to the Ephesians: "You are no more strangers..., but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and the domestics of God, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief corner stone."¹⁴¹³

Such is the solid, marvelously fruitful humility, which even in the most hidden places sings the glory of God. We ought, therefore, to receive humbly the special direction He has chosen for us, even though it should lead us to profound immolation: "The Lord killeth and maketh alive; He bringeth down to hell and bringeth back again.... He humbleth and He exalteth."¹⁴¹⁴ This is one of the most beautiful recurrent themes in the Scriptures.

Thirdly, in this special direction chosen by God for us, we cannot take the slightest step forward, or perform the least salutary and meritorious act without the help of an actual grace. We need this grace particularly to persevere to the end and should, consequently, humbly ask for it.

Even if we had a high degree of sanctifying grace and charity, ten talents for example, we should still need an actual grace for the least salutary act. And especially for a happy death we need the great gift of final perseverance, which we must daily ask for in the Hail Mary with humility and confidence. Christian humility says joyfully with St. Paul: "Not that we are sufficient to think anything of ourselves, as of ourselves; but our sufficiency is from God."¹⁴¹⁵ "No man can say the Lord Jesus, but by the Holy Ghost."¹⁴¹⁶ In short, humility should recognize practically and a little better every day the majesty of God the Creator, the Ordainer of all things, and the Author of grace.

Finally, while humility, which recognizes our indigence, should be found in all the just and should be in the innocent man, it is after we commit sin that we should recognize practically not only our indigence, but our wretchedness: the baseness of our selfish, narrow hearts, of our inconstant wills, of our vacillating, whimsical, ungovernable characters; the wretched weaknesses of our minds, guilty of unpardonable forgetfulness and contradictions that they could and should avoid; the wretchedness of pride, of concupiscence, which leads to indifference to the glory of God and the salvation of souls. This wretchedness is beneath nothingness itself since it is a disorder, and it occasionally plunges our souls into a contemptible state of abjection.

The Divine Office often reminds us in the Miserere of these great truths: "Have mercy on me, O God, according to Thy great mercy, and according to the multitude of Thy tender mercies blot out my iniquity. Wash me yet more from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin.... To Thee only have I sinned, and have done evil before Thee.... Thou shalt sprinkle me with hyssop, and I shall be cleansed: Thou shalt wash me, and I shall be made whiter than snow:.... Turn away Thy face from my sins, and blot out all my iniquities. Create a clean heart in me, O God; and renew a right spirit Within my bowels.... Restore unto me the joy of Thy salvation."¹⁴¹⁷ "Who can understand sins? From my secret ones, cleanse me, O Lord."¹⁴¹⁸

How greatly this abasement of genuine humility differs from pusillanimity, which is born of human respect or of spiritual sloth! Contrary to magnanimity, pusillanimity refuses the necessary labor. Humility, far from being opposed to grandeur of soul, is united to it. A Christian should tend toward great things worthy of great honor, but he should tend toward them humbly and, if necessary, by the way of great humiliations.¹⁴¹⁹ He should learn to say often: "Not to us, O Lord, not to us; but to Thy

name give glory.”¹⁴²⁰

The pusillanimous man is one who refuses to do what he can and should do; he may sin mortally when he refuses to accomplish what is gravely obligatory. Humility, on the contrary, abases man before the Most High that he may take his true place. It abases him before God only to allow God to act more freely in him. Far from becoming discouraged, the humble soul entrusts itself to God and, if the Lord does great things through it, it does not glorify itself any more than the ax in the hands of the woodsman, than the harp in the hands of the harpist. With the Blessed Virgin Mary, the humble soul says: “Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it done to me according to thy word.”

HUMILITY TOWARD OUR NEIGHBOR

Writing on the subject of humility toward our neighbor, St. Thomas says in a manner as simple as profound: “Wherefore every man, in respect of that which is his own, ought to subject himself to every neighbor, in respect of that which the latter has of God’s.”¹⁴²¹

In fact, every man, considering that of himself he is nothing, that what he has of himself is only his indigence, defectibility, and deficiencies, ought not only in a speculative way but also in a practical way to recognize that all he has of himself as coming from himself, is inferior to what every other man has from God in the order of nature and that of grace.

The holy doctor adds in substance: It is possible, without falsehood, to deem and avow ourselves the most despicable of men, as regards the hidden faults which we acknowledge in ourselves and the hidden gifts of God which others have.¹⁴²² For this reason the Psalmist says: “From my secret ones [sins], cleanse me, O Lord.”¹⁴²³ St. Augustine says also: “Consider that certain people are in a hidden way better than you are, although you may appear morally superior to them.”¹⁴²⁴

We should also say with St. Augustine: “There is no sin committed by another which I, by reason of my own frailty, may not commit; and if I have not committed it, it is because God in His mercy has not permitted it and has preserved me in goodness.”¹⁴²⁵ We should give God the glory for our not having fallen and say to Him in the words of Scripture: “Create a clean heart in me, O God: and renew a right spirit within my bowels.”¹⁴²⁶ “Convert me, and I shall be converted.”¹⁴²⁷ “Look Thou upon me, and have mercy on me; for I am alone and poor.”¹⁴²⁸

St. Thomas says: “Since God’s love is the cause of goodness in things, no one thing would be better than another if God did not will greater good for one than for another.”¹⁴²⁹ “What hast thou that thou hast not received?”¹⁴³⁰ This truth leads the saints to say to themselves when they see a criminal about to undergo the last punishment: “If this man had received the same graces that I have been receiving for so many years, he would perhaps have been less unfaithful than I. And if God had permitted in my life the sins which He permitted in this man’s, I would be in his place and he in mine.” “What hast thou that thou hast not received?” This is the true basis of Christian humility. All pride should break against these divine words.

The humility of the saints thus becomes ever more profound, for they experience increasingly their own frailty in contrast with the majesty and the goodness of God. We should tend toward this humility of the saints, but should not employ the formulas they use so long as we are not profoundly convinced that they are true. Should we do so, our humility would evidently be false; in comparison with the true virtue, it is like a paste diamond.

Humility toward our neighbor, thus defined by St. Thomas, differs greatly from human respect and pusillanimity. Human respect (*timor mundanus*) is the fear of the judgment and wrath of the wicked; this fear turns us away from God. Pusillanimity refuses the necessary toil; it flees the great things it should accomplish and inclines toward base things. Humility, on the other hand, makes us abase ourselves nobly before God and before what is of God in our neighbor. The humble man does not abase himself before the power of the wicked; thus he differs, says St. Thomas, from the ambitious man who abases himself far more than he should to obtain what he desires, and makes himself a lackey in order to attain power.

Humility does not flee great things; on the contrary it strengthens magnanimity by making man tend humbly toward lofty things. These two virtues, which support each other like the arches of a vault, are complementary. They are magnificently presented to us in our Lord when He says: “The Son of man is not come to be ministered unto, but to minister [this is humility], and to give His life a redemption for many [this is magnanimity with zeal for the glory of God and the salvation of souls].”¹⁴³¹ Our Savior could not tend to greater things and tend more humbly toward them: He willed to give us eternal life by the way of the humiliations of His passion and cross. Thus, all proportion being kept, these two virtues, which in appearance are so contradictory, are united in the saints. The humble John the Baptist did not fear the anger of Herod when he reproved him for his immoral conduct; the apostles in their humility did not fear the opposition of men; they were magnanimous even to martyrdom. There is something similar in all the saints, and the more humble they are, the stronger they are, the less they fear human opinions, however formidable these may be. We have an example of this courage in the humble and intrepid Vincent de Paul facing Jansenist pride, which he recognized and denounced, in order to preserve for souls the grace of frequent Communion.

Practically, what must we do to reach the perfection of humility, without which we cannot have that of charity? Our attitude

toward praise and reproach is of great importance. In regard to praise, we must not laud ourselves; by so doing we would soil ourselves, as the Italian proverb says: “Chi si loda, s’imbroda.” Men praise themselves when they think they are not sufficiently praised by others. Furthermore, we must not seek praise; should we do this, we would render ourselves ridiculous and lose the merit of our good acts. Lastly, we should not take pleasure in praise when it comes; to do so would be to lose, if not the merit of our good actions, at least the flower of merit.

We must, however, mount still higher by acting as we should in regard to reproaches. We must patiently accept deserved reproaches, especially when they come from superiors who have the right and the duty to make them. If we pout, we lose the benefit of these just observations. It is also fitting that we accept patiently at times a reproach that is only slightly deserved or undeserved. Thus, while still a novice, St. Thomas was unjustly reproved for a so-called mistake in Latin while reading in the refectory. He corrected himself as he had been told to do; later at recreation his brethren were astonished and said to him: “You were right. Why did you correct yourself?” “It is better in the eyes of God,” answered the saint, “to make a mistake in grammar than to fail in obedience and humility.” Lastly, we would do well to ask for a love of contempt, keeping in mind the examples of the saints. When our Lord asked St. John of the Cross: “What do you wish for a reward?” the saint replied: “To be scorned and to suffer for love of Thee.” His prayer was granted a few days later in the most painful manner; he was treated like an unworthy religious in a scarcely credible fashion. Likewise St. Francis of Assisi said to Brother Leo: “If when we arrive this evening at the door of the convent, the brother porter does not wish to open the door for us, if he takes us for thieves and receives us with blows and leaves us outside all night in the rain and cold, then we must say: Santa letizia, that is, what joy, O Lord, to suffer for Thee and to become a little like Thee.” The saints reached even this height.

St. Anselm admirably described the degrees of humility: (1) to acknowledge ourselves contemptible; (2) to grieve on account of this; (3) to admit that we are so; (4) to wish our neighbor to believe it; (5) patiently to endure people’s saying it; (6) willingly to be treated as a person worthy of contempt; (7) to love to be treated in this fashion.”¹⁴³²

These higher degrees are stated in all books of piety but, as St. Teresa says: “The disposition to practice this (the higher degrees of humility) must be, in my opinion, the gift of God; for it seems to me a supernatural good.”¹⁴³³ They presuppose a certain infused contemplation of the humility of the Savior crucified for us and the ardent desire to become like to Him.

It is certainly fitting to tend to this lofty perfection. Rare are they who attain it; but before reaching it, the interior soul has many occasions to recall these words of Jesus, which are so simple, profound, and truly imitable, all proportion being kept: “The Son of man is not come to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give His life a redemption for many.”¹⁴³⁴ This is the deepest humility united to the loftiest grandeur of soul.

In our way we should also follow the Savior and gradually be conformed to Him. For this reason we shall devote the following chapter to a consideration of the humility of Jesus as the eminent exemplar of ours.¹⁴³⁵

The Humility of the Word Made Flesh and What Ours Should Be

“Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: who... emptied Himself, taking the form of a servant.”

Phil. 2: 5–7

In studying humility, we should consider how it was practiced by our Lord Himself, whose example we should follow, and see how this abasement is united in Him to the highest virtues.

THE HUMILITY AND MAGNANIMITY OF CHRIST

In the second chapter of his epistle to the Philippians, St. Paul, wishing to exhort us to humility, speaks of the infinite majesty of the Savior that we may better see to what an extent He humbled Himself. The union of these two extremes is amazing, and should be found to some extent in Christian perfection.

In this celebrated passage, St. Paul teaches clearly the eternal preexistence of the divine person of Christ. He tells us: “Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus, who being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God; but emptied Himself, taking the form of a servant, being made in the likeness of men, and in habit found as a man. He humbled Himself, becoming obedient unto death, even to the death of the cross.”

“Being in the form of God...” The word “form” in St. Paul’s text designates intimate, fundamental, essential being; in this case, the nature of God. In other words, although the only Son of the Father is truly God, “the brightness of His glory, and the figure of His substance,” as we read in the Epistle to the Hebrews,¹⁴³⁶ He did not eagerly retain His equality with God.

Lucifer, on the contrary, though only a creature, wished to be equal to God and not to recognize in practice any master superior to himself. In the error of his pride, he exclaimed: “I will be like he Most High,”¹⁴³⁷ and in order to tempt us he tells us: “You shall be as gods.”¹⁴³⁸

Jesus, who is truly God, emptied Himself. St. Paul here affirms the divinity of Christ as clearly as it is expressed in the prologue to St. John’s Gospel: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.... The only begotten Son who is in the bosom of the Father, He hath declared Him.”¹⁴³⁹

“He emptied Himself.” How? He did not lose His divine nature; He remained what He was, but He took or assumed our poor human nature. In coming down from heaven, He did not leave it, but He began to dwell on earth in the humblest condition. In this sense He emptied Himself. Whereas the divine nature is the infinite plenitude of all perfections, human nature is as if empty, although it aspires to plenitude; the human intellect is at the beginning like a blank page on which nothing is written. The only Son of God emptied Himself, taking our human nature, which is infinitely below the divine nature, and even below the purely spiritual nature of the angels, even of the lowest among them.

“He took the form of a servant,” for man, God’s creature, is the servant of the Most High. The only Son of the Father therefore took in His divine person the nature of a servant, the condition of a slave, so that one and the same person might be the Son of God and the Son of man, that the same person might be the only Son begotten from all eternity and the Infant in the crib at Bethlehem and the Man of sorrows nailed to the cross.

“Being made in the likeness of men, and in habit found as a man.” He wished to be rendered like His brethren in all things, sin excepted; even more, He wished to be born among the poor. He was cold and hungry, like a man of humble condition. He was tired and worn out, as we are and more than we are.

St. Paul adds, penetrating far more deeply into this mystery: “He humbled Himself, becoming obedient unto death.” The God-man humbled Himself. We read in Ecclesiasticus: “The greater thou art, the more humble thyself in all things, and thou shalt find grace before God: for great is the power of God alone, and He is honored by the humble.”¹⁴⁴⁰ For this reason Christ Himself tells us: “Learn of Me because I am meek, and humble of heart.”¹⁴⁴¹

The sign of humility is obedience. Pride, on the contrary, inclines us to do our own will and to seek what exalts us, not to wish to be directed by others, but to direct them. Obedience is opposed to this pride. The only Son of the Father came down from heaven to save us, to cure our pride, becoming obedient unto death, and even to the death of the cross.

Obedience renders our acts and sufferings meritorious to such an extent that, useless as they may appear, they may become very fruitful. One of the marvels accomplished by our Savior is to have rendered fruitful what was most useless, that is, suffering. He glorified it by obedience and love. Obedience is great, heroic, when man does not refuse death and does not flee ignominy. Now the death of the Word made flesh was most ignominious. It was announced by the Book of Wisdom, in the

words of the impious directed against the wise man par excellence: “Let us condemn him to the most shameful death.”¹⁴⁴² Death on the cross was considered precisely by the Romans and Jews as an infamous and horrible torture reserved to slaves. We read in Deuteronomy: “He is accursed of God that hangeth on a tree.”¹⁴⁴³ And St. Paul says to the Galatians: “Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law [which is powerless to justify us], being, made a curse for us; for it is written: ‘Cursed is everyone that hangeth on a tree.’”¹⁴⁴⁴ This abasement was necessary before Christ entered into His glory as Redeemer.

Likewise in the Epistle to the Hebrews, St. Paul speaks of “the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasure of the Egyptians.”¹⁴⁴⁵ Farther on, he says: “Jesus, the author and finisher of faith... endured the cross, despising the shame, and now sitteth on the right hand of the throne of God.”¹⁴⁴⁶

We can thus see how the cross of the Savior was “a stumbling block” for the Jews.¹⁴⁴⁷ They had to believe that the wood of malediction became the instrument of salvation, that He who was fastened to it, instead of being accursed of God, was to become the source of every grace, the object of love and adoration.¹⁴⁴⁸

All that St. Paul says is already contained in the mystery of the nativity of the Lord, who came down from heaven for our salvation, as the Credo states. The infant Jesus foresaw all these painful and glorious events. As we read in the Epistle to the Hebrews: “When He cometh into the world, He saith: ‘Sacrifice and oblation [of the Old Law] Thou wouldst not; but a body Thou hast fitted to Me.... Then said I: Behold, I come to do Thy will, O God.’”¹⁴⁴⁹ This heroic example of humble obedience should be always before our eyes.

The liturgy of Christmas continually recalls this example by contrasting the humility and the majesty of our Savior:

Memento, salutis auctor,
Quod nostri quondam corporis
Ex illibata Virgine
Nascendo formam sumpseris.

Author of grace, sweet Savior mine,
Remember that Thy flesh divine
From the unsullied Virgin came,
Made like unto our mortal frame.

And in the office for Christmas we read these words of Pope St. Leo: “The two natures, divine and human, without losing their properties, are united in a single person; humility is sustained by majesty, weakness by power, mortality by eternity. If the Savior were not truly God, He would not bring the remedy; and if He were not truly man, He would not be an example for us.”

In the nativity of Jesus everything speaks to us of His humility. We read in St. Luke: “She brought forth her first-born Son, and wrapped Him up in swaddling clothes, and laid Him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn.”¹⁴⁵⁰ There was no room for the Word of God made flesh; a fact we must not forget when there is no room for us. The first adorers were poor shepherds “watching, and keeping the night-watches over their flock” But a multitude of angels descended from heaven singing: “Glory to God in the highest; and on earth peace to men of good will”¹⁴⁵¹

The two extremes are united: “The Word was made flesh.” It is the joining of supreme riches and perfect poverty to give men redemption and peace. It is impossible to conceive a more intimate union of a more profound humility and a more lofty dignity. The two infinitely distant extremes are intimately united; God alone could do it. It is not only beautiful, it is sublime, an extreme elevation in the order of the spiritually beautiful. It is what makes the grandeur of Christ’s physiognomy. He always tends toward very great things, worthy of the greatest honor, but He tends to them most humbly with full submission to the will of His Father and acceptance in advance of all the humiliations of the Passion and cross, which He foresees from His infancy. He exemplifies the closest union of perfect humility and loftiest magnanimity.

THE UNION OF HUMILITY AND CHRISTIAN DIGNITY

In what regard must we imitate Christ in the union of humility and Christian dignity? How can we harmonize these two extremes in our lives: a humility which should always grow and the keen desire for perfection and union with God? On the one hand, the Lord tells us to abase ourselves, so much so that we cannot humble ourselves too greatly, and on the other hand, we read in Scripture: “Be ye also perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect.”

How can we harmonize “this abasement which is demanded of us, with the ardent desire for our progress? Souls fear to fail in humility by aspiring to a union with God of which they feel unworthy. The Jansenists went so far as to say that out of humility one should only rarely receive Communion. This practical difficulty exists especially, it is true, for souls that have lost the superior simplicity which comes from grace; but it may exist for us when we have to distinguish between true and false humility in ourselves. We experience it particularly when we must defend our way of living against that of others. At the beginning of the discussion we may speak solely for love of truth, but if we are constrained, often we reply with the impatience and pride of wounded self-love.

The simplest souls find the solution of this problem in rereading what Scripture says about the union of these two extremes: “Whosoever, therefore, shall humble himself as this little child, he is the greater in the kingdom of heaven.”¹⁴⁵² “Be you humbled therefore under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in the time of visitation: casting all your care upon Him for He hath care of you.”¹⁴⁵³ “Be humbled in the sight of the Lord, and He will exalt you.”¹⁴⁵⁴ “The Lord killeth and maketh alive, He bringeth down to hell and bringeth back again. The Lord maketh poor and maketh rich, He humbleth and He exalteth.”¹⁴⁵⁵

The union of deep humility and supernatural magnanimity is particularly mysterious in the saints. In this respect they reproduce the life of the Savior, while remaining far from His perfection. This point must be emphasized, for in it is a great lesson for us. On the one hand, the saints declare that they are the least of men because of their infidelity to grace, and on the other hand they have a superhuman dignity. For example, St. Paul says of himself: “He rose again the third day... and was seen by Cephas, and after that by the eleven. Then he was seen by more than five hundred brethren at once... and last of all He was seen also by me as by one born out of due time. For I am the least of the apostles, who am not worthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the Church of God.”¹⁴⁵⁶ He even speaks of the infirmities that humiliate him and oblige him to pray God to come to his relief.¹⁴⁵⁷

On the other hand, when St. Paul had to defend his ministry against false apostles, he wrote with magnanimity: “They are Hebrews: so am I.... They are the ministers of Christ (I speak as one less wise): I am more; in many more labors, in prisons more frequently, in stripes above measure, in deaths often.... Thrice was I beaten with rods, once I was stoned.”¹⁴⁵⁸ He enumerates his labors, his cares; he even speaks of the visions and revelations he received from God. But finally, reverting to a deeper humility he writes: “And lest the greatness of the revelations should exalt me, there was given me a sting of my flesh, an angel of Satan, to buffet me [that I might not become proud]. For which thing thrice I be sought the Lord that it might depart from me. And He said to me: ‘My grace is sufficient for thee; for power is made perfect in infirmity.’ Gladly therefore will I glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may dwell in me.”¹⁴⁵⁹

In his commentary on this chapter of the Second Epistle to the Corinthians, St. Thomas speaks admirably of the union of humility and magnanimity in St. Paul. He writes as follows: “As charity is the root of the virtues, pride is the beginning of every sin.”¹⁴⁶⁰ It is the inordinate desire of our own excellence: we desire it then without subordinating it to God. Thus we turn away from Him, which is the beginning of every sin; for this reason God resists the proud.¹⁴⁶¹ As there is in good people the good of which they may become proud, God sometimes permits some infirmity in His elect, some defect, and occasionally a mortal sin, which prevents them from becoming proud, which truly humiliates them, and makes them recognize that they cannot hold out or persevere by their own strength. The apostle St. Paul in particular might have grown proud of many things: he was a vessel of election to carry the faith to the Gentiles;¹⁴⁶² he had been ravished to the third heaven and heard secret words, which it is not granted to man to utter;¹⁴⁶³ he had suffered greatly for Christ, several times he had been cast into prison, and scourged; he was a virgin (having obtained mercy of the Lord to be faithful);¹⁴⁶⁴ he had labored more than all, as he says;¹⁴⁶⁵ and in particular he had a lofty knowledge of divine things which may be the source of pride. For this reason the Lord gave him a remedy for pride. That the excellence of the revelations made to him might not make him proud, he received a sting in the flesh, a humiliating infirmity which crucified his body in order to heal his soul.... As he says, an angel of Satan came and buffeted him. How the sinner should tremble if the great Apostle, the instrument of election, is not sure of himself! Three times he ardently begged the Lord to deliver him from this sting; three times, that is, often and urgently. He then heard these words: ‘My grace is sufficient for thee,’ it will preserve thee from sin. Divine power is shown in weakness, which is an occasion for the exercise of the virtues of humility, patience, and abnegation. The man who knows his weakness is more attentive to resisting it and, because he struggles, he grows in strength. ‘Gladly therefore will I glory in my infirmities,’ says St. Paul, since I am thus more humble, and I must fight that the power of Christ may dwell in me and bear all its fruits of grace.”¹⁴⁶⁶

Something similar occurred in the life of St. Peter, who was humiliated because he denied our Lord during the Passion. Peter thus lost all presumption and placed his confidence no longer in himself, but in God alone.

The principle of the harmonizing of humility and Christian magnanimity is expressed in these words of St. Paul: “We have this treasure [of divine truth] in earthen vessels, that the excellency may be of the power of God and not of us.”¹⁴⁶⁷ One of the most beautiful formulas of the harmonizing of humility and magnanimity is the following, taken from the works of St. Thomas: “The servant of God should always consider himself a beginner and always tend toward a more perfect and holy life without ever stopping.”¹⁴⁶⁸

Thus in the great saints humility and magnanimity are harmonized; they tend toward great things in the midst of trials and humiliations. There is, however, always an immense difference between them and the Savior; Christ who was most humble is sinless, without the slightest fault to deplore, most humble in His absolute impeccability and His sovereign dignity.

In the Blessed Virgin Mary, due proportion being kept, there is something similar. She was preserved from every sin, and in her Magnificat she appears at one and the same time very humble and very great, terrible to the demon: “My soul doth magnify

the Lord.... He hath regarded the humility of His handmaid; for behold from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed. Because He that is mighty hath done great things to me.... He hath put down the mighty from their seat, and hath exalted the humble.”¹⁴⁶⁹

Something analogous appears also for our consolation in the life of the Church, the spouse of Christ. Throughout its history Christ’s words are verified: “Everyone that exalteth himself, shall be humbled; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.”¹⁴⁷⁰ Christ made this statement when He spoke of the guests who took the first places, and again in the parable of the Pharisee and the publican.¹⁴⁷¹ In persecutions the Church often seems conquered; yet it is always victorious. In its humility it tends toward the great things which are the glory of God and the salvation of souls.

Lastly, there should be something similar in every Christian, especially in every religious. He must be truly humble like a root hidden under the ground, and he should always tend toward these great things, a more living faith, a more firm hope, a more ardent charity, a union with God that is daily more intimate, pure, and strong. Thus extremes are harmonized, like the deep root of the tree which symbolizes humility and the loftiest branch which is the figure of charity. All the virtues are connected and grow together, just as the root buries itself ever deeper in the soil, while the tallest branch reaches up toward heaven.

Thus in the mystical body of the Savior should be realized what St. Leo said of Christ Himself: “Humility is sustained by majesty, weakness by strength, mortality by eternity.” Gradually in the mystical body of Christ “that which is mortal, may be swallowed up by life.”¹⁴⁷² “For this corruptible must put on incorruption,”¹⁴⁷³ that the mystery of the redemption may be accomplished, that the incarnate Word may apply to us the fruit of His merits and be actually and fully the Author of salvation.

What majesty there is in the title *Salutis auctor!* And how well united it is with these words: “Learn of Me, because I am meek, and humble of heart: and you shall find rest to your souls.”¹⁴⁷⁴ May the Savior grant us the grace to become like to Him. We have no true humility except that which He gives us; therefore we must sincerely beg it of Him and accept the road which leads to it.

APPENDIX: THE GLORY OF THE CROSS

“He humbled Himself... even to the death of the cross. For which cause God also hath exalted Him, and hath given Him a name which is above all names.”
Phil. 2:8 f.

(We reproduce here a manuscript that has come into our possession, and have added some explanatory notes. It is a meditation on the glory of Christ in relation to the depth of His humiliations and sufferings.)

“For God so loved the world, as to give His only begotten Son.”¹⁴⁷⁵ In the great mystery of the Incarnation, the mystery of ineffable love, there is a core which is impenetrable to human reason, a secret which God alone reveals: the reason for the immense sufferings of the redemptive Passion.

If, in the presence of the crucifix, each Christian can say: “Jesus crucified, pledge of the love of my Father,” not one is capable of telling the reason which motivated the decree of the Passion and death of the Son of God. This decree is the secret of divine love.¹⁴⁷⁶

We adore the excesses of humiliation, the indescribable ignominies to which the incarnate Word subjected Himself in obedience to His Father and through love of men, His brethren, but we cannot explain these excesses, this ocean of sufferings, until the Lord Himself lifts the veil covering this “holy of holies.” Then the mystery still remains a mystery, but the soul, enlightened regarding its secret, contemplates in ecstasy the ineffable harmonies of the divine masterpiece: the glory of the redemptive cross.

The words of holy Scripture: “I will not give My glory to another,”¹⁴⁷⁷ sum up what is hidden in this secret of the passion and death of Christ Jesus, and contain at the same time the marvelous harmony of all the divine words.

From all eternity God willed the Incarnation of the Word, His Son, as Redeemer of the world and head of redeemed humanity. In our Lord Jesus Christ [habitual] grace has for its principal end the most eminent union that God can grant to a created nature, that is, the hypostatic union, by which the Son of Mary, while enjoying the beatific vision from the moment of His incarnation, could affirm: “The Father and I are one.” This grace was given to Jesus Christ for the end which determined His coming to earth: this end is no other than the satisfaction which, as head of His mystical body, He was to offer to the thrice holy God.

However, by reason of the infinite dignity of the person of the Word, a single drop of the blood of our Lord Jesus Christ would have sufficed to redeem a thousand worlds, did they exist. Therefore, not in the necessity of redeeming sinful humanity should we seek the motive for the excesses of the most holy passion and death of Christ. Let us seek it, rather, in the splendors of the glory of the Incarnation (or of the manifestation of the radiating goodness of the Savior), because it is there that we shall find it. The essential glory of God, the incommunicable and essential glory of the adorable Trinity became in the mystery of the Incarnation the magnificent portion of the sacred humanity of Jesus, as the Eagle of the Evangelists says in the prologue to his

Gospel: “And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us (and we saw His glory, the glory as It were of the only begotten of the Father), full of grace and truth.”¹⁴⁷⁸

The excesses of the sorrow and humiliation of the passion and death of our Lord were the compensation demanded by divine wisdom, which does all things with weight and measure, in exchange for the ineffable glory which the God-man would enjoy eternally.¹⁴⁷⁹ “I will not give My glory to another.” Yahwe had spoken through His prophet, and these words were not belied, not even in favor of the incarnate Word, since by His passion and death our Lord Jesus Christ not only snatched the entire world from the domination of Satan and death, but in addition He won for His most sacred humanity the right to be enthroned in the eternal tabernacles at the right hand of the Father. Our Lord alluded to the necessity of conquering this right¹⁴⁸⁰ on the evening of His resurrection when He said to the disciples of Emmaus: “O foolish, and slow of heart to believe in all things which the prophets have spoken. Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and so to enter into His glory?”¹⁴⁸¹ In fact, the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ is admirable, indescribable, since it is the glory of the only Son of the Father, and as such this glory exceeds the capacity of comprehension of human and angelic intellects; only God Himself can fully appreciate it, since He alone knows Himself perfectly.

Although the glory of the only Son is ineffable, a Gospel text gives us a little light on the subject: “He that believeth in Me, as the Scripture saith, Out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water.”¹⁴⁸² Jesus spoke this to all in a loud voice on the feast of tabernacles. And the Evangelist St. John adds: “This He said of the Spirit which they should receive who believed in Him.” To give the Holy Ghost to souls is the glory of the risen Christ, a glory that is unique, ineffable. Sacred Scripture continues: “For as yet the Spirit was not given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.”¹⁴⁸³ The Holy Ghost will be given on Pentecost when, through the humiliations of His passion and death, the Lord Jesus will enter into His glory because “he that humbleth himself, shall be exalted.”¹⁴⁸⁴

And who has ever humbled himself like the Pontiff of the New Law, Christ our Lord? Consequently, in justice no one ever was or ever will be as exalted as He: “He humbled Himself, becoming obedient unto death, even to the death of the cross. For which cause God also hath exalted Him and hath given Him a name which is above all names: that in the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those that are in heaven, on earth, and under the earth: and that every tongue should confess that the Lord Jesus Christ is in the glory of God the Father.”¹⁴⁸⁵ *O gloria crucis.*¹⁴⁸⁶

The pages just quoted throw special light on the Savior’s humiliations, the dark night of His passion, and also on the night through which the saints must pass. This manuscript enables us to understand better what St. John of the Cross wrote about the night of the soul, and the reparatory sufferings which great servants of God like St. Paul of the Cross have had to bear. It is a well-known fact that having been raised to the transforming union at the age of thirty-one, St. Paul of the Cross spent forty-five years in continual and most profound interior sufferings for the salvation of sinners. He was closely configured to Jesus crucified: the depths, the duration, the continuity of his sufferings were proportioned to the “eternal weight of glory,” to use the expression of St. Paul, which he was to receive in heaven.

Thus we see the elevation of the infused virtues and what the progress of humility should be in proficients and the perfect: “He that humbleth himself shall be exalted.”¹⁴⁸⁷

The Spirit of Poverty

“Blessed are the poor in spirit.”

Matt. 5: 3

Since we have treated of humility and meekness, it is fitting that we consider the virtues corresponding to the evangelical counsels. As we have already spoken of virginity in connection with chastity, it remains for us to explain how poverty and obedience cooperate in Christian perfection.

To attain perfection, man must practice the three counsels effectively: in other words, in the use of legitimate goods it is expedient that he retrench before reaching the limit of what is permitted, that he may not be led into excess. The effective practice of the three counsels, as we have seen,¹⁴⁸⁸ is a road leading more easily, rapidly, and surely to perfection, which is reached in this way more often in the religious life than in the married state. However, Christian perfection does not consist essentially in the practice of the counsels; it is chiefly in charity.¹⁴⁸⁹ Moreover, to reach perfection, one must have at least the spirit of the counsels, which is the spirit of detachment, as St. Paul says: “The time is short. It remaineth that they also who have wives be as if they had none;... and they that buy, as though they possessed not; and they that use this world, as if they used it not. For the fashion of this world passeth away.”¹⁴⁹⁰

We shall discuss, first of all, the spirit of poverty, recommended to all by our Lord when He said: “Blessed are the poor in spirit.”

THE VALUE OF VOLUNTARY POVERTY

The meaning of this evangelical beatitude is as follows: blessed are they who have not the spirit of wealth, its pomp, pride, insatiable avidity; but who have the spirit of poverty and are humble. Christ says: “For theirs is the kingdom of heaven”; not only will it be theirs later on, but in a sense it is theirs even now.

Voluntary poverty can be practiced either in the midst of the abundance of worldly goods, when the spirit is not attached to them, or in destitution when one bears it generously for love of God. The value of voluntary poverty may even appear to those who have not faith, because they see the disorders which arise from cupidity, the concupiscence of the eyes, the desire of riches, avarice, the excesses of capitalism, and the forgetfulness of the poor who are dying of hunger.

We must begin to detach ourselves from earthly goods in order to grasp clearly the following truth often uttered by St. Augustine and St. Thomas: “Contrary to spiritual goods, material goods divide men, because they cannot belong simultaneously and integrally to a number.”¹⁴⁹¹ A number of persons cannot possess integrally and simultaneously the same house, the same field, the same territory; whence dissensions, quarrels, lawsuits, wars. On the contrary, spiritual goods, like truth, virtue, God Himself, can belong simultaneously and integrally to a number; many may possess simultaneously the same virtue, the same truth, the same God who gives Himself wholly to each of us in Communion.

Therefore, whereas the unbridled search for material goods profoundly divides men, the quest for spiritual goods unites them. It unites us so much the more closely, the more we seek these superior goods. And we even possess God so much the more, the more we give Him to others. When we give away money, we no longer possess it; when, on the contrary, we give God to souls, we do not lose Him; rather we possess Him more. And should we refuse to give Him to a person who asks for Him, we would lose Him.

Consequently to combat cupidity, the concupiscence of the eyes, the desire of riches, avarice, and the forgetfulness of the poor, our Lord counseled voluntary poverty, or detachment in regard to earthly goods which divide men. Christ leads us thus to desire keenly spiritual goods, which unite men.

The spirit of detachment is even necessary for the Christian that he may clearly understand the true meaning of the right of individual ownership instead of infringing on this right, which is often forgotten; interior souls should have a profound knowledge of it. As St. Thomas shows, the right of ownership is the right to acquire and to administer material goods; but in regard to their use, they must be given readily to those who are in need.¹⁴⁹²

St. Paul says: “Charge the rich of this world not to be high-minded nor to trust in the uncertainty of riches, but in the living God, who giveth us abundantly all things to enjoy: to do good, to be rich in good works, to give easily, to communicate to others, to lay up in store for themselves a good foundation against the time to come, that they may lay hold on the true life.”¹⁴⁹³

Such is the spirit of detachment; it should remind all of us of what St. Thomas says elsewhere: namely, that if a poor man in a

case of extreme necessity asks for a piece of bread and is refused, he may take it, and not be guilty of theft. He has a right to it in order not to die of hunger. A man's life is clearly worth more than a piece of bread which we have not the right to retain jealously if one of our brothers is in absolute need of it.

It is a precept that a man should give alms from his superfluity that he may aid him who is in grave necessity.¹⁴⁹⁴ What has been said of a piece of bread should be said of clothing and necessary shelter. There must be a return to the spirit of evangelical poverty in order to combat today the abuses of capitalism which exasperate the laborer who is out of work and unable to feed his children. Scripture tells us: "Whilst the wicked man is proud, the poor is set on fire."¹⁴⁹⁵ The rich man, far from being a monopolist, should administer the goods given by God in such a way that the poor profit in regard to what is necessary. Then man no longer lives under the reign of covetousness and jealousy, but under the dominion of God.¹⁴⁹⁶

It is fitting today to recall these elementary truths even when speaking of the progress of the interior life, for the grave disturbances and perils of modern society require that we consider these truths from a higher point of view and that we put them into practice with a great spirit of faith and detachment. This is the true remedy for two extreme deviations which are mutually contradictory: the abuses of capitalism and the excesses of communism, two contrary disorders springing from a materialistic conception of human life and from forgetfulness of the Gospel.¹⁴⁹⁷ The value of voluntary poverty is brought out by these very disorders, which are disturbingly serious.

The value of detachment appears in a more positive way when we remember the true goods we should ardently desire. Christ tells all of us what they are, and interior souls should have a deeper understanding of His teaching: "Be not solicitous for your life, what you shall eat, nor for your body, what you shall put on. Is not the life more than the meat, and the body more than the raiment? Behold the birds of the air, for they neither sow, nor do they reap,... and your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are not you of much more value than they? Seek ye therefore first the kingdom of God and His justice, and all these things shall be added unto you. Be not therefore solicitous for tomorrow; for the morrow will be solicitous for itself. Sufficient for the day is the evil thereof."¹⁴⁹⁸

The spirit of detachment thus leads us to a stronger desire for the goods of heaven and to reliance on the help of God to reach the end of the journey. Voluntary poverty and confidence in God go hand in hand; the more detached man is from earthly goods, the more he desires those of heaven; and the less he relies on human helps, the more he places his confidence in God's help. Thus confidence in God is the soul of holy poverty. All Christians should have the spirit of this counsel.

Since we are considering the effective practice of voluntary poverty, let us recall the answer our Lord gave to the rich young man who wished to know the surest road to perfection. Christ answered him: "Go, sell whatsoever thou hast, and give to the poor; and thou shalt have treasure in heaven. And come, follow Me. Who being struck sad at that saying, went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions."¹⁴⁹⁹ He preferred to keep them rather than to follow our Lord and win souls, rather than to become a "fisher of men" like the apostles.

The effective practice of voluntary poverty is of counsel; it is not obligatory; but to be perfect one must have at least the spirit of the counsel, the spirit of detachment in the midst even of riches, if one keeps them.

St. Francis de Sales¹⁵⁰⁰ develops this teaching, saying that voluntary poverty is a great good, but one which is little known; that it is a principle of happiness; that it must be observed in the midst of wealth and also in real poverty, if we should happen to lose everything.

Now if you love the poor, be often in their company, be glad to see them in your house, and to visit them in theirs. Converse willingly with them, be pleased to have them near you in the church, in the streets, and elsewhere.... Make yourself then a servant of the poor; go and serve them in their beds when they are sick... at your own expense.... This service is more glorious than a kingdom.... St. Louis frequently served at table the poor whom he supported, and caused three poor men to dine with him almost every day, and many times ate the remainder of their food with an incomparable love. When he visited the hospitals,... he commonly served... such as had the most loathsome diseases, kneeling on the ground, respecting in their persons the Savior of the world.... St. Elizabeth, daughter of the King of Hungary, often visited the poor.... But should you meet with losses which impoverish you... as in the case of tempests, fires, inundations,... lawsuits, then is the proper season to practice poverty... with meekness... and patience.¹⁵⁰¹

St. Francis de Sales adds that truly Christian poverty should be gay, and that he who has chosen it should not seek his comfort, but should suffer some discomforts for the love of God; otherwise, how would this virtue be for him a means of union with God? The examples of St. Francis of Assisi, St. Dominic, and St. Benedict Joseph Labre, show us to what close union with God this virtue can lead us when practiced for love of God.

THE FRUITFULNESS OF VOLUNTARY POVERTY

St. Thomas¹⁵⁰² tells us that Christ willed to be poor for four reasons: (1) because voluntary poverty is fitting for the preacher, who should be freed from the care of earthly goods; (2) because He wished to show that He desires only the salvation of souls; (3) that He might lead us to desire especially eternal goods; (4) that divine power which saves souls might stand forth more clearly in the absence of human helps. This is also the reason why Christ chose poor fishermen of Galilee as His apostles.

Thus is demonstrated the fruitfulness of voluntary poverty; it is the hundredfold promised by Christ.

In the first place, the spirit of poverty frees us from excessive preoccupation about exterior goods, which are then no longer an obstacle in our progress toward God, but a means of doing good. Thus delivered, the Christian may run the way of perfection; he no longer thinks of settling down on earth as if he were to remain there always, for he understands that he is there only temporarily. He is no longer embarrassed, as it were, by useless baggage in his journey toward eternity; aware of being a traveler, a viator, he aspires to reach his last end without delay. His pace is even quickened, becomes ever more rapid, because he is always more drawn by the last end in proportion as he approaches it.

In the second place, voluntary poverty is a sign of disinterestedness, particularly necessary for an apostle; for it should be evident he has no interest but that of winning souls for our Lord, as St. Dominic told the prelates who arrived in Languedoc with a whole suite to preach the Gospel to people seduced by the errors of the Albigenses. These prelates understood then that they should preach first by example, by true detachment; and they sent away their retinue.

In the third place, voluntary poverty is materially fruitful in a degree that sometimes borders on the miraculous. To see this fact, one need only visit certain convents dedicated to the care of the poor, such as the homes of the Little Sisters of the Poor, or the *piccola casa* of St. Joseph Cottolengo in Turin, “a little house” which shelters ten thousand indigent sick, and which subsists only on the alms received from day to day. It is like a perpetual miracle worked by divine Providence in response to the trust of the holy founder and his sons, who understood the profound meaning of Christ’s words: “Seek ye therefore first the kingdom of God and His justice, and all these things shall be added unto you.”¹⁵⁰³ These servants of the poor live by the supernatural contemplation of this truth and by its practice.

Fourthly, more admirable still is the spiritual fruitfulness of the spirit of poverty. It teaches us patience, humility, detachment in regard to higher goods, to all that is not God and the love of God, that is, in respect to the goods of the intellect, of the heart, and of certain goods of the soul.

The goods of the intellect are our knowledge, our talents if we have any. In study we must know how to avoid curiosity, vainglory, useless natural eagerness; how to place this study truly at the service of God, detaching ourselves from our own lights, from our excessively personal views. If we do this, the Lord will in this case also give us the hundredfold: a superior simplicity, that of true contemplation, which forgets itself in order to lose itself in its object. St. Albert the Great practiced this spirit of poverty in respect to the immense learning he had acquired. He was told that he would lose the use of his memory; this took place, and during the rather long period of life that was left to him, he remained as if completely absorbed in the contemplation of God. In place of the acquired learning that he had lost, he received a very superior treasure, a lofty degree of infused contemplation that he might live most profoundly by the mysteries of salvation.

The goods of the heart are our affections, and also the affection full of esteem and confidence that others show us. We must live in a certain detachment in regard even to these goods that we may not fall into sentimentalism. We must not cling to being loved, esteemed; we must also consecrate our legitimate affections to God, placing them under the influx of true charity, which will reveal to us what a treasure is a truly supernatural friendship that is wholly generous. It is a great gift of God, which He occasionally grants to those who have renounced all.

Finally, the spirit of poverty also teaches us to practice detachment from certain goods of the soul, that is, spiritual consolations. They must certainly not be sought for themselves; were this done, they would cease to be a means of progress toward God and would become an obstacle. We must consent to be weaned from them when the Lord judges it to be for our good. Following the advice of St. Grignon de Montfort, many interior souls strip themselves of all that is communicable to others in their prayers and good works and entrust it to the Blessed Virgin that she may use it to the best advantage of souls on earth or in purgatory in greatest need of it. By this denudation the Christian prepares himself for a higher spiritual poverty, which is a great gift of God and recalls the destitution of Christ on the cross, abandoned by His people, by many of His own, and to all appearances abandoned by His Father. Interior souls find this higher spiritual poverty in the last purification which St. John of the Cross calls the dark night of the soul. Victim souls experience more profoundly than others this absolute stripping of themselves and this immolation which configures them to Christ that they may obtain the salvation of sinners.

Thus, in different degrees, the spirit of poverty and still more voluntary poverty effectively practiced for love of God, enrich the Christian while stripping him and obtain the hundredfold for him. Such is the lofty meaning of the evangelical beatitude: “Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”

THE MERIT OF THE VOWS

With St. Thomas¹⁵⁰⁴ we must add that it is more meritorious to perform a good act with a vow than without, and this for three reasons: (1) because the vow is an act of the virtue of religion, or of the worship of *latría*. This virtue is the most noble of the moral virtues; hence it renders more meritorious the acts of poverty, chastity, and obedience which it inspires, commands, and offers to God as a holocaust.

Moreover, charity itself inspires the vow; it is made out of love and is a true testimony of love that is at times highly meritorious. If anyone greatly loves another, he places himself at the other's service out of affection. Thus the soul that wishes to love God greatly places itself forever at His service out of love, binding itself to Him by a vow. It has been objected that he who is already closely united to God through charity, the highest of the virtues, does not find an additional perfection in binding himself to God by a vow. If he is already a friend, he does not have to become a servant; so much so that our Lord said: "I will not now call you servants.... But I have called you friends." The answer to this objection is that he who loves God finds an additional perfection in placing himself through love at God's service for his entire life.^{[1505](#)}

St. Thomas adds two other reasons:(2) he who promises God a succession of good works and accomplishes them subjects himself more to God than if he accomplished them without having promised them. Thus he who gives the tree and its fruits offers more than if he offered only the fruits while retaining possession of the tree.(3) Lastly, by the vow the will is immutably fixed in the good, which is an additional perfection.

Consequently it is evident that the vows of religion, especially perpetual and solemn vows, add to the acts of poverty, chastity, and obedience, an additional merit, that of the virtue of religion, which is itself offered to God as worship by charity that inspires all the other virtues. The soul consecrated to the Lord thus belongs more intimately to Him.

The Grandeur of Obedience

Obedience is the highest of the three evangelical counsels, just as the pride of life is in itself a graver disorder than the concupiscence of the flesh and that of the eyes. Pride, which was the sin of the rebellious angel and of the first man, is the source of all deviations because it turns us away from God to put our trust in ourselves. In this sense it is a more serious sin than other more shameful sins which incline us toward vile things, but which turn us less directly away from God.¹⁵⁰⁶ Cold, hard pride, which leads man to refuse to adhere to the word of God or to obey Him, is a more serious sin than inordinate attachment to the pleasures of the senses or to earthly goods. For this reason Christ said to the Pharisees who were led astray by their pride: “Amen I say to you, that the publicans and the harlots shall go into the kingdom of God before you. For John came to you in the way of justice, and you did not believe him. But the publicans and the harlots believed him: but you, seeing it, did not even afterwards repent, that you might believe him.”¹⁵⁰⁷

We know these things theoretically, but in practice we forget them. We think more readily of the manifest disorders which arise from the concupiscence of the flesh or from that of the eyes, and we do not adequately recognize that the great sin is the sin of him who said: “Non serviam, I will not serve.” This is the principal sin of the world that calls itself “modern,” while claiming to separate itself from the Church. It still desires indeed to repress gross instincts, to struggle against avarice, to labor for the amelioration of the lot of the working class, but it intends to do all this by itself, without the help of God, of our Lord, and of the Church. Only too often it wishes to obey only its own reason, its own judgment, its own will, and this rationalism leads it to disobey reason rather than to obey God. Its own reason leads it, like the prodigal son, into dishonorable, debasing servitude, occasionally into real tyranny, that of rebellious popular passions and that of criminal, unjust laws, put into effect in spite of the protests of conscience, in the interest of the party in power. Obedience to the commandments of God and of the Church would free society from these servitudes which oppress the best and lead society into disorder, confusion, and ruin. Such an evil can be cured only by a holy reaction in the direction of profound, humble, Christian obedience. Yet the grandeur of obedience, even in relatively good circles, is too often misunderstood.¹⁵⁰⁸

The better to see the value of this virtue, we shall consider first of all from what servitude it delivers us and what are its spiritual fruits with regard to union with God.

THE TYPE OF SERVITUDE FROM WHICH OBEDIENCE DELIVERS US

Obedience delivers us from a twofold slavery: that of self-will and that of our own judgment.

Obedience to God, to His spiritual and temporal representatives, daily assures the conformity of our will with the divine will,¹⁵⁰⁹ It thus delivers us from self-will, that is, from a will which is not conformed to that of God, and which through pride goes astray, acting contrary to the current of grace and refusing to act in the true direction.

Self-will thus defined is the source of every sin. For this reason St. Bernard says: “Take away self-will, and there will no longer be any hell.” Self-will is particularly dangerous because it can corrupt everything. Even what is best in man becomes evil when self-will enters in, for it takes itself as its end instead of subordinating itself to God. If the Lord sees that it inspires a fast, a penance, a sacrifice, He rejects them as Pharisaical works accomplished through pride in order to make oneself esteemed. Without going that far, we must admit that we cling greatly to our own will. Occasionally we hold to our way of doing good more than to the good itself; we wish it to be done, but by ourselves and in our way. When this egoism becomes collective, it may be called esprit de corps, a corruption of family spirit; it is the source of a great many unpleasantnesses, partialities, defamations. Sometimes a certain group wishes to promote a good work, or it hinders one from being developed. It is like wishing to smother a child who seems to be one too many, when as a matter of fact it may become the honor of the family. Evidently such a course of action can only displease the Lord.

In religion, the vow of obedience assures the mortification of this dangerous self-will which turns the soul away from salvation. That it may control self-will, the vow must be practiced with a spirit of faith, seeing in the orders of superiors, in spite of their imperfections or defects, orders given by God, from whom all power comes. Religious obedience should be prompt and universal: that is, it should extend alike to little and great things; it should obey all legitimate superiors, whether they be amiable or not, particularly prudent or less enlightened, holy or less perfect, because it is always God who speaks, as long as the order given is not contrary to a higher law and does not exceed the limits of the constitutions which the religious promised to observe. Such obedience is a deliverance, for it assures from day to day the conformity of man’s will with God’s

will, and by that very fact it greatly fortifies the will while rectifying it.

Obedience delivers us also from the servitude of our own judgment, that is, from an excessively subjective judgment not sufficiently founded on truth, not conformed to the judgment of God. Our own personal judgment is in this sense the source of singularity in conduct and stubbornness which leads to nothing and impedes the good which others wish to do. It is a hasty judgment springing from our prejudices, our evil dispositions, our self-love, our pride. Occasionally the enemy of our soul is the one who suggests it to us or confirms it when we ourselves have already formed it. Following Aristotle, St. Thomas often says: "According as we are well or ill disposed in our will and sensible faculties, a given end seems good or evil to us." The proud man judges that what flatters his pride is excellent, whereas the humble man judges that humiliation is good for him.

Our own judgment often leads to rash judgment, contrary to justice and charity. In it there is servitude, slavery; we are the slaves of our egoistic prejudices, and they lead us away from salvation and union with God.

Obedience delivers us from this slavery by assuring the conformity of our practical judgment with that of the representative of God, who has the right to give us an order in His name.¹⁵¹⁰ It may be that this representative of God is mistaken on some point or other; he is not infallible like the pope speaking *ex cathedra*, but as long as the order given is not manifestly contrary to a higher law and does not exceed the powers of the one who commands, we are obliged to obey, and our practical judgment is not deceived in obeying. Sometimes the messenger of Providence may limp, but he is still God's messenger; he brings us a letter or an order of divine origin.

The effective practice of the counsel of obedience is found especially in the religious life; it is a much surer road for reaching perfection more rapidly by progressive conformity to the will of God even in the depths of our will and the details of daily life.

But we must at least have the spirit of the counsel actually to reach Christian perfection, that is, the spirit of detachment from self-will to which we cling. As a child should obey his father, his mother, and the teachers who train him, every Christian should obey all who are for him the spiritual or temporal representatives of God. There is the obedience of the wife to her husband, that of the soldier to his leaders, of the servant to his master, of every subordinate to his superiors, of every Christian to the Church and to the constituted authorities in the Church. If this obedience is practiced, not merely in a servile, mechanical, exterior manner, but in the spirit of faith, it greatly forms the will, renders it flexible, and fortifies it while subordinating it daily a little better to the will of God, of the living God who vivifies us. It is well to recall often that "there is no power but from God,"¹⁵¹¹ that one cannot obey an equal, but only a superior, and that, in short, it is God who is obeyed.

Similarly we must obey events so far as they are signs of the divine will. Theology teaches that the divine will is manifested to us not only by the precepts and the counsels, but also by events willed or at least permitted by God.¹⁵¹² Nothing, in fact, happens unless God has willed it (if it is a good), or permitted it (if it is an evil). To be perfect our obedience should take into consideration these signs of the will of God. For example, legitimate success in an examination gives us a position that makes possible for us the accomplishment of a more extended good; let us not compromise this good by imprudent or cowardly acts. On the contrary, we are humiliated by a failure, or by an illness, which sometimes show us that the way we are engaged in is not what God wishes for us.

There are particularly significant events which, from the temporal point of view, change the situation of a family or the organization of society. We must know how to draw the greatest spiritual profit from them and not wish at any cost to revert to an order of things which was useful in the past and which probably is no longer willed by God in the period in which we are living. One does not go back up the course of life or that of history; the old man does not return to adolescence; and our century cannot return to what existed in the thirteenth, though it should seek to profit by all the good handed down by past ages in order to prepare a future in which God truly reigns.

In all these forms of obedience to all that manifests the will of God, in obedience to the duty of the present moment from minute to minute, the Christian ought always to have before his eyes as his model the Savior, who was "obedient unto death, even to the death of the cross."¹⁵¹³ Thus the martyrs and all the saints obeyed, finding their joy in dying to self-will that they might feed on that of God according to the Savior's words: "My meat is to do the will of Him that sent Me."¹⁵¹⁴

THE FRUITS OF OBEDIENCE

To comprehend the grandeur and the fruits of obedience, we should remember that it is more perfect to offer God one's will and judgment than to offer Him exterior goods through voluntary poverty, or one's body and heart through chastity.¹⁵¹⁵ It is also more perfect to offer Him one's will than to sacrifice to Him exteriorly a lamb or a dove, as was done in the sacrifices of the Old Testament. With this meaning, Scripture says: "Obedience is better than sacrifices: and to hearken rather than to offer the fat of rams."¹⁵¹⁶

The fruits of obedience are chiefly the following: it gives a great rectitude of judgment, great strength of will, the highest liberty of spirit.

The greatest rectitude of judgment comes from the fact that obedience makes us participate in the very wisdom of God; it renders us more wise than the wisest, more prudent than the ancients: *Super senes intellexi*. In the most difficult and the most complicated situations, it brings us the solution that is practically true for us here and now. Practically, we do not make a mistake in obeying, even if the superior is mistaken. By humble obedience a simple lay brother, Blessed Martin de Porres of Peru, did more for his country than statesmen who do not think of praying to obtain light.

As a reward for fidelity, perfect obedience obtains from the Holy Ghost, even here on earth, the inspirations of the gift of counsel that direct us in the most hidden things of the spirit which a director or a superior could not state precisely and which our prudence could not succeed in settling properly. The gift of counsel is particularly necessary for those whose duty it is to command, that they may do so supernaturally; for this reason if a man does not begin by obeying well, he will never know how to command. God gives His lights to the obedient.

Obedience also gives great strength of will. Naturalism declares at times that obedience weakens the will; on the contrary, it strengthens the will tenfold. When, in fact, there is no reason to doubt that an order comes from God through the intermediary of a legitimate superior, it is also certain that by divine grace the fulfillment of this order is possible. As St. Augustine says: "God, in fact, never commands the impossible; but He tells us to do what we are able and to ask Him for the grace to accomplish what we cannot do of ourselves."¹⁵¹⁷ Therefore St. Augustine used to pray: "Lord, give me the strength to accomplish what Thou dost command, and command what Thou dost wish."

Because God never commands the impossible, when in certain circumstances martyrdom is of precept, in the sense that it must be undergone rather than deny the faith, God gives the strength to obey, to be faithful to Him in the midst of torture; and He gives this strength even to children, to young virgins, like St. Agnes, or to old men weakened by age. In such cases especially are realized the words of Scripture: "An obedient man shall speak of victory."¹⁵¹⁸

Without going as far as martyrdom, obedience works prodigies. We need only cite the example of the first sixteen sons of St. Dominic. Strong in the Pope's blessing, the holy founder sent them from Toulouse into various parts of Europe to found convents and to carry on the apostolate. Having no money to give them, the saint said to them: "You shall beg your food; I will pray for you three times a day. I promise you that, in spite of the distress of poverty, you will never lack what is necessary." The sixteen religious, trusting in the words of their Father, obeyed; they left joyfully like the first apostles, and were not slow in multiplying in Italy, Spain, England, even in faraway Poland, and among the infidels of the Orient whom they went to evangelize. This example and many others confirm the grandeur of obedience. When an order is given, and there is no doubt but that it comes from God, the grace which makes its fulfillment possible is most certainly bestowed. If a person prays to be faithful to this grace and not to resist it, he accomplishes the command not without difficulty sometimes, but he accomplishes it.

Finally, obedience, far from being a servitude, bestows the highest liberty, that of the children of God, as voluntary poverty gives true spiritual riches, as perfect charity obtains the intimacy of the love of God. A French author, Alfred de Vigny, wrote a beautiful book on the life of a soldier; it is entitled, *Servitude et grandeur militaires*; in perfect Christian obedience there are a servitude and a superior grandeur that are truly supernatural. Of this obedience St. Paul speaks when he reminds us that we should desire to be "delivered from the servitude of corruption into the liberty of the glory of the children of God";¹⁵¹⁹ "Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty,"¹⁵²⁰ that is to say, deliverance, for divine truth delivers the soul from error. Injecting truth into life, obedience sets man free from the prejudices of the world, from its maxims, modes, and infatuations. It frees him from excessive preoccupation about the judgment of men, from concern about what people will say, instead of doing good and letting them talk. Obedience delivers him from his doubts, hesitations, and anxieties. It simplifies life while elevating it. With it liberty grows, for in man liberty comes from the intellect, and the more enlightened his intellect is, the more free he is. The more man understands that God is the sovereign Good, the freer he is not to respond to the attraction of earthly goods, and the stronger he is against the threats of the impious. Who was freer than the martyrs? Through love and obedience they freely gave their blood in witness of divine truth, and neither iron nor fire could force an abjuration from them. They obeyed in a spirit of faith and for love of God, like the Savior, who was obedient "unto death, even to the death of the cross."

The grandeur of obedience is expressed in this frequently quoted, holy expression: "To serve God is to reign," that is, to reign over one's passions, over the spirit of the world, over the enemy of souls and his suggestions; it is to reign in the very kingdom of God and, so to speak, to share in His independence toward all created things. It is to place oneself like a docile instrument in His hands for all that He wishes, following out St. Augustine's words which we have already quoted: "Lord, give me the strength to accomplish what Thou dost command, and command what Thou dost wish."

Of a certainty obedience thus understood prepares for the contemplation of divine things; it prepares us to see the will of God or His permission in all pleasurable or painful events, and it helps us. to understand "that to them that love God [and persevere in His love], all things work together unto good."

Chapter 16

Simplicity and Uprightness

“If thy eye be single, thy whole body shall be lightsome.”

Matt. 6: 22

Christian prudence or holy discretion, of which we have spoken, should be accompanied by a virtue, simplicity, which is to all appearances quite different. Christ Himself expressed this when He said to His apostles: “Behold I send you as sheep in the midst of wolves. Be ye therefore wise as serpents and simple as doves.”¹⁵²¹

Sending His apostles as sheep in the midst of wolves, Christ recommends to them prudence especially toward the wicked, that they may not be deceived by them, and simplicity in reference to self and to God. The more simple the soul is in regard to God, the more He Himself, by the gift of counsel, will inspire the prudence to be observed in difficult circumstances, in the midst of the greatest obstacles. Consequently Christ announces immediately afterward to His followers that the Holy Ghost will inspire them with what they must reply to persecutors.

Where this simplicity does not exist, prudence begins to become false and to turn into cunning. The crafty or the shrewd man makes sport, says Holy Scripture, of the simplicity of the just: “The simplicity of the just man is laughed to scorn,” says Job.¹⁵²² People try to make simplicity pass for naivete and lack of penetration; it may indeed be accompanied in some by artlessness, but it is essentially something superior.

To get a correct idea of the virtue of simplicity and of veracity and uprightiness which it makes us preserve, we should note first of all the defects opposed to it. God permits evil only for a greater good, in particular to bring virtue into greater relief. We have a better understanding of its value through the aversion inspired in us by the contrary vices.

DEFECTS OPPOSED TO SIMPLICITY

According to St. Thomas,¹⁵²³ simplicity is attached to the virtue of veracity, which puts truth into speech, gestures, manner of being and of living. Simplicity, in fact, is opposed to duplicity, by which we interiorly wish something other than what exteriorly we pretend. A man wishes other people’s money and pretends to render them service; in reality, he wishes to make use of them or of what belongs to them; or again, he wishes power and honors, and to obtain them pretends to serve his country; he pretends to be magnanimous, when in reality he is only ambitious. This defect of duplicity, which may become Machiavellianism or perfidy, inclines a man to be two-faced, according to the people he is addressing, like the Roman god Janus that was represented with two faces. A two-faced man pretends to be your friend, tells you that you are right, and he tells your adversaries that they are not wrong.

Duplicity inspires lies, simulation, which leads a man to make himself esteemed for something other than he is, hypocrisy, by which he affects a virtue, a piety which he does not have. It also inspires boasting, because one prefers appearance to reality; one seeks to appear rather than to be what one should. It also inspires raillery, which turns others into ridicule in order to lower them in their neighbor’s esteem and to exalt oneself above them.

All these defects, which are frequent in the world, show by contrast the value of uprightiness or veracity in life.

VERACITY AND THE INTERIOR LIFE

Veracity, a virtue attached to justice, leads a man to tell the truth always and to act in conformity with it. This does not mean that every truth should be told to everybody, sermonizing right and left and boasting of a frankness which borders on insolence or lack of respect. But if every truth is not to be told, if there are truths which it is expedient to suppress, we should avoid speaking against the truth and falling into an officious lie, which we are tempted to tell in order to escape from an embarrassing situation. If we have committed this sin, we must accuse ourselves frankly of it, instead of seeking by false principles to justify this manner of acting. Thus to act would gradually bring about the loss of all loyalty and would destroy all confidence in human testimony, which is indispensable to the life of society.

It is indeed difficult at times, when faced with an indiscreet question, to keep a secret which has been entrusted to one and at the same time not to speak contrary to the truth.¹⁵²⁴ But if the Christian is habitually docile to the inspirations from above, the Holy Ghost will inspire him in such difficult circumstances as these with the reply to make or the question to ask, as He did the first Christians when they were led before the tribunals. Christ foretold this when He said: “When they shall deliver you up, take no thought how or what to speak: for it shall be given you in that hour what to speak. For it is not you that speak, but the

Spirit of your Father that speaketh in you.”¹⁵²⁵ This prediction was often verified during the French Revolution when priests were hunted down and when, to prevent them from bringing the last sacraments to the dying, they were asked all sorts of insidious questions. The Holy Ghost often inspired their answers, which, though not opposed to the truth, permitted them to continue their ministry.

Every Christian in the state of grace has the seven gifts of the Holy Ghost, which render him docile to receive His inspirations, given especially in difficult circumstances where even our infused prudence is insufficient. St. Thomas says even that for this reason the gifts of the Holy Ghost are necessary to salvation as the complement of the infused virtues.¹⁵²⁶ The casuists should have remembered this great truth instead of having recourse to theories that occasionally were hazardous, in order to permit certain mental restrictions which were so slightly manifest that they bordered singularly on falsehood. It is better to recognize that one has committed a venial sin of lying than to have recourse to theories which falsify the definition of a lie, in order not to admit it there where it is. It is of great importance to preserve the spirit of uprightness of which our Lord speaks when He says: “Let your speech be yea, yea: no, no: and that which is over and above these, is of evil”¹⁵²⁷ He spoke in this manner to those who, in order to make their testimony believed, swore without reason by heaven or by the temple at Jerusalem. Disrespectful oaths expose one to perjury; if a man is accustomed always to tell the truth, others will believe his speech.

In treating of veracity, St. Thomas makes a remark which particularly concerns the interior life. This virtue, he says,¹⁵²⁸ inclines a man to keep silent about his own qualities, or not to manifest the whole good that is in him; this is done without prejudice to the truth, since not to speak of it, is not to deny its existence. St. Thomas even quotes on the subject the following reflection of Aristotle: “Those who represent themselves as being greater than they are, are a source of annoyance to others, since they seem to wish to surpass others: whereas those who make less account of themselves are a source of pleasure, since they seem to defer to others by their moderation.”¹⁵²⁹ St. Paul also says: “For though I should have a mind to glory, I shall not be foolish; for I will say the truth. But I forbear, lest any man should think of me above that which he seeth in me, or anything he heareth from me.”¹⁵³⁰

The virtue of veracity thus practiced, not only in speech but in action, in our whole way of living, brings truth into our lives. And when our life is established in the truth, then God, who is supreme Truth, inclines toward us by His divine inspirations, which gradually become the principle of a higher contemplation. To let ourselves fall into the habit of lying is to turn away from the truth and to deprive ourselves of the higher inspirations of the gift of wisdom. Habitual living in the truth prepares us to receive these inspirations, which make us penetrate and taste divine truth that we shall someday contemplate unveiled.

SUPERIOR SIMPLICITY, THE IMAGE OF THAT OF GOD

Another aspect of veracity, the superior simplicity of the saints, prepares the soul even more for contemplation. Simplicity is opposed not only to duplicity, but to every useless complexity, to all that is pretentious or tainted with affectation, like sentimentality which affects a love that one does not have. What falsity to wish to talk in a glowing style as if one were already in the seventh mansion of the interior castle, when one has not yet entered the fourth! How far superior is the simplicity of the Gospel!

We say that a child’s gaze is simple because the child goes straight to the point without any mental reservation. With this meaning Christ says to us: “If thy eye be single, thy whole body shall be lightsome”; that is, if our intention is upright and simple, our whole life will be one, true, and luminous, instead of being divided like that of those who try to serve two masters, God and money, at the same time. In the presence of the complexities, the pretenses, the more or less untruthful complications of the world, we feel instinctively that the moral virtue of simplicity or of perfect loyalty is a reflection of a divine perfection.

The simplicity of God is that of the pure Spirit who is Truth itself and Goodness itself. In Him are no thoughts that succeed one another; there is but one thought, ever the same, which subsists and embraces every truth. The simplicity of His intellect is that of a most pure gaze which, without any admixture of error or ignorance, has unchangeably as its object every knowable truth. The simplicity of His will or of His love is that of a sovereignly pure intention ordering all things admirably and permitting evil only for a greater good.

The most beautiful characteristic of God’s simplicity is that it unites in itself perfections which in appearance are most contradictory: absolute immutability and absolute liberty; infinite wisdom and the freest good pleasure, which at times seems arbitrary to us; or again infinite justice, which is inexorable toward unrepented sin, and infinite mercy. All these perfections are fused and identified without destroying each other in the eminent simplicity of God.

We find a reflection of this lofty simplicity in the smile of a child and in the simplicity of the gaze of the saints, which is far superior to all the more or less untruthful intricacies of worldly wisdom and prudence.

What a false notion of simplicity we sometimes form when we imagine that it consists in telling frankly all that passes through our minds or hearts, at the risk of contradicting ourselves from one day to the next, when circumstances will have

changed and the persons whom we see will have ceased to please us! This quasi-simplicity is instability itself and contradiction, and consequently complexity and more or less conscious untruth; whereas the superior simplicity of the saints, the image of that of God, is the simplicity of an unchanging wisdom and of a pure and strong love, superior to our impressionability and successive opinions.

St. Francis de Sales often speaks of simplicity.¹⁵³¹ He reduces it to the upright intention of the love of God, which should prevail over all our sentiments, and which does not tarry over the useless search for a quantity of exercises that would make us lose sight of the unity of the end to be attained. He says also that simplicity is the best of artifices because it goes straight toward its goal. He adds that it is not opposed to prudence, and that it does not interfere with what others do.

The perfect soul is thus a simplified soul, which reaches the point of judging everything, not according to the subjective impression of the moment, but in the divine light, and of willing things only for God. And whereas the complex soul, which judges according to its whims, is disturbed for a trifle, the simplified soul is in a constant state of peace because of its wisdom and its love. This superior simplicity, which is quite different from naivete, or ingenuousness, harmonizes perfectly, therefore, with the most cautious Christian prudence that is attentive to the least details of our acts and to their proximate or remote repercussion.

The soul of a St. Joseph, a St. John, a St. Francis, a St. Dominic, or a Cure of Ars gives us an idea of the simplicity of God; still more so does the soul of Mary, Morning Star, Queen of virgins and of all saints, Queen of peace. Higher still the holy soul of Christ reflects most purely the simplicity of God.

In Christ we find harmonized in a simple way the holy rigor of justice toward the hypocritical Pharisees and immense mercy toward all souls of which He is the Good Shepherd. In Him are united in the simplest manner the deepest humility and the loftiest dignity. For thirty years He lived the hidden life of a poor workman; He tells us that He came to serve, not to be served. On Holy Thursday He washed the feet of His disciples; He accepted the utmost humiliations of the Passion; He said simply to His Father: "My Father, if it be possible, let this chalice pass from Me. Nevertheless, not as I will, but as Thou wilt."¹⁵³² Before Pilate He proclaims simply His universal royalty: "My kingdom is not of this world.... Thou sayest that I am a king. For this was I born, and for this came I into the world; that I should give testimony to the truth. Every one that is of the truth, heareth My voice."¹⁵³³ He dies simply, saying: "Father, into Thy hands I commend My spirit.... It is consummated."¹⁵³⁴ In this simplicity is such grandeur that the centurion, seeing Him die, could not refrain from exclaiming: "Indeed this was the Son of God."¹⁵³⁵

The centurion had the gaze of a contemplative; he sensed in the dying Christ, who seemed to be definitively conquered, Him who was winning the greatest victory over sin, the devil, and death. This light of contemplation was given to him by the dying Christ, by the Savior, who inclines more particularly toward the simple who are clean of heart.

This superior simplicity, even in souls without learning, is a preparation for the profound understanding of divine things. The Old Testament had already declared: "Seek Him [the Lord] in simplicity of heart."¹⁵³⁶ "Better is the poor man that walketh in his simplicity, than a rich man that is perverse in his lips."¹⁵³⁷ "Let us all die in our innocency,"¹⁵³⁸ said the Machabees, under the injustice which afflicted them. "Obey," says St. Paul,... "in simplicity of heart."¹⁵³⁹ And he exhorts the Corinthians to beware lest they "fall from the simplicity that is in Christ."¹⁵⁴⁰ Simplicity must be observed toward God, superiors, and self. It is the truth of life.

This simplicity, says Bossuet,¹⁵⁴¹ is what permits limpid souls "to enter the heights of God," the ways of Providence, the unsearchable mysteries at which complex souls take scandal, the mysteries of the infinite justice, the infinite mercy, and the sovereign liberty of the divine good pleasure. All these mysteries, despite their obscurity, are in their loftiness simple for the simple.

Why are these mysteries simple for some and obscure for others? The answer lies in the fact that in divine things the most simple, like the Our Father, are also the loftiest and the most profound. We forget this fact because the inverse is true in the things of the world, in which good and evil are intimately mingled. Hence they are often very complex, and then he who wishes to be simple in this domain lacks penetration; he remains naive, ingenuous, and superficial. In divine things, on the contrary, simplicity is united to depth and elevation, for divine things that are highest in God and deepest in our hearts are simplicity itself.

We have an example in the profound simplicity of the Blessed Virgin Mary and also in that of St. Joseph, who, after our Lord and Mary, was the most eminently simple and contemplative soul the world has ever seen. His simplicity was the effect of his unique predestination as foster father of the Savior together with the habits of life of a humble carpenter. Leo XIII, in his encyclical on the Patronage of St. Joseph, says: "There is no doubt that more than anyone he approached that supereminent dignity by which the Mother of God so highly surpasses all creatures."¹⁵⁴²

St. Thomas Aquinas also had in a very eminent degree the virtue of simplicity, which is an aspect of veracity, of the truth of life.

In recent times God has given us a lofty example of the simplicity of the saints united to the contemplation of the mysteries of

faith in the person of St. Teresa of the Child Jesus.¹⁵⁴³ She says: “Far from resembling those beautiful souls who, from their childhood, practiced all sorts of macerations, I made mine consist solely in breaking my will, in withholding an answer, in rendering little services without drawing attention to them, and many other things of this kind.”¹⁵⁴⁴ “In my little way, there are only ordinary things; little souls must be able to do all that I do.”¹⁵⁴⁵ “How easy it is to please Jesus, to ravish His heart,” she used to say; “one has only to love Him, without looking at oneself, without too greatly examining one’s defects. Consequently, when I happen to fall into some fault, I pick myself up at once. A glance toward Jesus and the knowledge of one’s own wretchedness make reparation for everything. He calls Himself the ‘Flower of the fields’ (Cant. 2: 1) in order to show how greatly He cherishes simplicity.”¹⁵⁴⁶

Speaking of her way of training the novices, she remarked on the subject of disputes which may arise between two persons: “Nothing is easier than to cast the blame on the absent. I do just the contrary. My duty is to tell the truth to the souls entrusted to me, and I tell it.”¹⁵⁴⁷

Again she states: “It is an illusion to think that one can do good outside obedience.”¹⁵⁴⁸ And we see to what a degree in her own life were realized these words of hers: “The Lord is often pleased to give wisdom to little ones.”¹⁵⁴⁹ It is not therefore surprising that His Holiness Pius XI should have declared in his homily for the feast of her canonization: “It has therefore pleased the divine Goodness to endow and to enrich Sister Teresa with an entirely exceptional gift of wisdom.... The Spirit of truth showed her and taught her what He ordinarily hides from the wise and prudent and reveals to the humble.”¹⁵⁵⁰ Pope Benedict XV had spoken in like terms: “This happy servant of God had herself so much knowledge that she was able to indicate to others the true way of salvation.” Her life and doctrine show how greatly the superior simplicity of the saints opens their intellect and renders it docile to the inspirations of the Holy Ghost, that they may penetrate and taste the mysteries of salvation and attain to union with God.¹⁵⁵¹

The saints know well what this union demands that it may be preserved in the midst of circumstances often unforeseen and painful. Superior simplicity united to discretion reminds them, no matter what happens, that “to them that love God [and persevere in this love], all things work together unto good.”

To some it seems useless in a treatise on ascetical and mystical theology to insist on virtues such as these, and they are in a hurry to deal with questions on infused contemplation that are disputed among theologians and psychologists. We think, on the contrary, that it is extremely necessary to insist, as all the saints have done and as is done in every cause of beatification, on these Christian virtues which have so profound an influence on thought and life. Then the traditional doctrine on infused contemplation appears as a resultant of all that has been said about the progress of the acquired virtues, the infused virtues, and the seven gifts of the Holy Ghost in interior souls truly detached from themselves and almost continually united to God. Under the pretext that the doctrine relative to the Christian virtues and the seven gifts is known by all, some never examine it deeply. Contemplation is, nevertheless, in the sweet and profound intuition of the divine truths known by all Christians, for example, of those expressed in the Our Father. The virtue of simplicity, conceived as a reflection in us of the divine simplicity, reminds us of this fact.

The Spirit of Faith and Its Progress

We have spoken of the progress of the Christian moral virtues in the illuminative way; now we shall discuss the progress of the theological virtues, first of all that of faith and its influence on our whole life. By so doing we shall be prepared to see what mental prayer should be in the illuminative way.

We shall see the nature of the spirit of faith, then how it should grow in us, finally what its excellence and power should be that we may continually live by it, according to the words of Scripture: "The just man liveth by faith."¹⁵⁵²

THE NATURE OF THE SPIRIT OF FAITH

In reality man always lives according to one spirit or another; whether it be according to the spirit of nature, when he does not go beyond practical naturalism, or according to the spirit of faith, when he tends seriously toward his last end, toward heaven and sanctity.

The spirit according to which we live is a special manner of considering all things, of seeing, judging, feeling, loving, sympathizing, willing, and acting. It is a particular mentality or disposition that colors almost all our judgments and acts, and communicates to our life its elevation or depression. Consequently the spirit of faith is a special manner of judging all things from the higher point of view of essentially supernatural faith, which is based on the authority of God revealing, on the veracity of God, Author of grace and glory, who by the road of faith wishes to lead us to eternal life.

We may better grasp the nature of the spirit of faith by considering the spirit opposed to it, which is a sort of spiritual blindness that enables man to attain divine things only materially and from without.¹⁵⁵³ Thus Israel, the chosen people, did not have a sufficiently spiritual understanding of the privilege which it had received and in which, with the coming of the Savior, other peoples, called also to receive the divine revelation, were to share. The Jews thought that the bread reserved to the children of Israel should not be given to pagans. Christ reminds us of this way of thinking in the first words He addresses to the woman of Canaan; then He immediately inspires her with the admirable reply: "Yea, Lord; for the whelps also eat of the crumbs that fall from the table of their masters." Then Jesus answering, said to her: "O woman, great is thy faith: be it done to thee as thou wilt. And her daughter was cured from that hour."¹⁵⁵⁴

The spirit of faith, which the Jews lacked and this humble woman possessed, is the spirit of divine and universal truth, the very object of faith, above any particularism of peoples or human societies. Thus St. Paul, who was at first strictly attached to the Synagogue and its prejudices, became the Apostle of the Gentiles. Similarly the glory of St. Augustine and St. Thomas does not consist in their being the masters of only a group of disciples, but in their being the common doctors of the Church.

The spirit of faith can have this universality only because of its eminent simplicity, which is a participation in the wisdom of God. The act of faith, as St. Thomas points out, is far above reasoning, a simple act by which we believe at the same time in God revealing and in God revealed.¹⁵⁵⁵ By this essentially supernatural act we adhere infallibly to God who reveals and to the mysteries revealed. Thus by this simple act, superior to all reasoning, we tend in obscurity toward the contemplation of divine things above all the certitudes of a natural order. The essentially supernatural certitude of infused faith, as we said before,¹⁵⁵⁶ greatly surpasses the rational certitude that man can have of the divine origin of the Gospel through the historical and critical study of the miracles which confirm it.

Faith, which is a gift of God,¹⁵⁵⁷ is like a spiritual sense enabling us to hear the harmony of revealed mysteries, or the harmony of the voice of God, before we are admitted to see Him face to face. Infused faith is like a superior musical sense enabling us to hear more or less indistinctly the meaning of a mysterious spiritual harmony of which God is the author. St. Paul states the matter clearly: "We have received not the spirit of this world, but the Spirit that is of God; that we may know the things that are given us from God. Which things also we speak, not in the learned words of human wisdom; but in the doctrine of the Spirit, comparing spiritual things with spiritual. But the sensual man perceiveth not these things that are of the Spirit of God; for it is foolishness to him, and he cannot understand, because it is spiritually examined. But the spiritual man judgeth all things; and he himself is judged of no man. For who hath known the mind of the Lord, that he may instruct Him? But we have the mind of Christ."¹⁵⁵⁸

For judging in this manner, faith is aided by the gift of understanding, which makes man penetrate the meaning of the mysteries, and by the gift of wisdom, which makes him taste them. But it is faith itself which makes us adhere infallibly to the word of God.

The theological virtue of infused faith, in spite of the obscurity of the mysteries, is very superior to the intuitive and very luminous knowledge which the angels possess naturally. Infused faith, in reality, belongs to the same order as eternal life, of which it is like the seed; as St. Paul says, it is “the substance of things to be hoped for,”¹⁵⁵⁹ the basis of our justification.¹⁵⁶⁰ The angels themselves needed to receive this gratuitous gift of God in order to tend to the supernatural end to which they were called.¹⁵⁶¹

As St. Francis de Sales¹⁵⁶² says in substance, when God gives us faith, He enters our soul and speaks to our spirit, not by way of discourse but by His inspiration. When faith comes, the soul strips itself of all discourses and arguments and, subjecting them to faith, it enthrones faith on them, recognizing it as queen. When the light of faith has cast the splendor of its truths on our understanding, our will immediately feels the warmth of celestial love.¹⁵⁶³

THE GROWTH OF INFUSED FAITH IN US

It is important for the sanctification of our souls to remember that faith should daily increase in us. It may be greater in a poorly educated but holy, just man than in a theologian. St. Thomas Aquinas states: “A man’s faith may be described as being greater, in one way, on the part of his intellect, on account of its greater certitude and firmness, and, in another way, on the part of his will, on account of his greater promptitude, devotion, or confidence.”¹⁵⁶⁴ The reason is that “faith results from the gift of grace, which is not equally in all.”¹⁵⁶⁵ Thus our Lord says of certain of His disciples that they are still men “of little faith,”¹⁵⁶⁶ “slow of heart to believe,”¹⁵⁶⁷ whereas He said to the woman of Canaan: “O woman, great is thy faith.”¹⁵⁶⁸

“But my just man liveth by faith,”¹⁵⁶⁹ and increasingly so. There are holy individuals who have never made a conceptual analysis of the dogmas of the Trinity, the Incarnation, the Eucharist, and who have never deduced from these dogmas the theological conclusions known to all theologians; but in these souls the infused virtue of faith is far more elevated, more intense than in many theologians. Many recent beatifications and canonizations confirm this fact. When we read the life of St. Bernadette of Lourdes or of St. Gemma Galgani, we can well exclaim: God grant that I may one day have as great faith as these souls!

Theologians say justly that faith may grow either in extension or in depth or in intensity. Our faith is extended when we gradually learn all that has been defined by the Church on the mysteries of the Trinity, the Incarnation, the Eucharist, and the other points of Christian doctrine. Thus theologians know explicitly all that has been defined by the Church; but it does not follow that they have a faith as intense and profound as it is extended. On the contrary, among the faithful there are saints who are ignorant of several points of doctrine defined by the Church, for example, the redemptive Incarnation and the Eucharist, and who penetrate profoundly these mysteries of salvation as they are simply announced in the Gospel. St. Benedict Joseph Labre, for example, never had occasion to read a theological treatise on the Incarnation, but he lived profoundly by this mystery and that of the Eucharist.

The apostles asked for this faith that is greater in depth and intensity when they said to the Lord: “Increase our faith.”¹⁵⁷⁰ And Jesus answered: “All things whatsoever you shall ask in prayer, believing, you shall receive.”¹⁵⁷¹ We shall obtain it especially if we ask perseveringly for ourselves what is necessary or manifestly useful to salvation, like the increase of the virtues.

THE EXCELLENCE AND THE POWER OF THE SPIRIT OF FAITH

The value of the spirit of faith is measured in trial by the difficulties which it surmounts. St. Paul says this eloquently in the Epistle to the Hebrews: “By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered Isaac: and he that had received the promises, offered up his only begotten son.... Accounting that God is able to raise up even from the dead.... By faith he [Moses] left Egypt, not fearing the fierceness of the king [Pharaoh]: for he endured as seeing Him that is invisible.... For the time would fail me to tell of Gedeon, Barac, Samson, Jephthe, David, Samuel, and the prophets; who by faith conquered kingdoms, wrought justice, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions [like Daniel], quenched the violence of fire [like the three children in the furnace].... And others had trial of mockeries and stripes, moreover also of bands and prisons. They were stoned [like Zachary], they were cut asunder [like Isaias], they were tempted, they were put to death by the sword, they wandered about in sheepskins, in goatskins, being in want, distressed, afflicted; of whom the world was not worthy.”¹⁵⁷² (This same type of thing has been renewed in our own day in Russia and Mexico.) And St. Paul concludes: “And therefore,... let us run by patience to the fight proposed to us: looking on Jesus, the Author and Finisher of faith, who having joy set before Him, endured the cross, despising the shame, and now sitteth on the right hand of the throne of God.”¹⁵⁷³

In his commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews, St. Thomas Aquinas, carried away by the word of God and raised to the contemplation of this mystery, tells us: “Consider Christ who bore such contradiction on the part of sinners..., and in no matter what tribulation, you will find the remedy in the cross of Jesus. You will find in it the example of all the virtues. As St. Gregory the Great says, if we recall the passion of our Savior, there is nothing so hard and so painful that we cannot bear it

with patience and love.”¹⁵⁷⁴

The more the spirit of faith grows in us, the more we grasp the sense of the mystery of Christ, who came into this world for our salvation. That we may have this understanding, the Church, our Mother, places daily before our eyes at the end of Mass the prologue of the Gospel of St. John, which contains the synthesis of what revelation teaches about the mystery of Christ. Let us nourish our souls daily with this sublime page which we shall never sufficiently penetrate. It recalls to us the three births of the Word: His eternal birth, His temporal birth according to the flesh, and His spiritual birth in souls. It is the summary of what is loftiest in the four Gospels.

In this summary of Christian faith we have, first of all, the eternal birth of the Word: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” We have here a clear statement of the consubstantiality of the Word. “No man has seen God at any time: the only begotten Son who is in the bosom of the Father, He hath declared Him.”¹⁵⁷⁵ Thus light is thrown on the loftiest words of the Messianic psalms: “The Lord hath said to Me: Thou art My Son; this day have I begotten Thee,”¹⁵⁷⁶ today in the unique instant of immobile eternity. “For to which of the angels,” St. Paul asks, “hath He said at any time: Thou art My Son, today have I begotten Thee?”¹⁵⁷⁷ The Word, splendor of the Father, is infinitely above all creatures, whom He created and preserves.

We should also nourish our souls with what is said in the same prologue about the temporal birth of the Son of God: “And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us (and we saw His glory, the glory as it were of the only begotten of the Father), full of grace and truth.”¹⁵⁷⁸ This temporal birth of Christ is the realization of all the Messianic prophecies and the source of all the graces that men will receive until the end of the world.

Lastly, we should live by what this same prologue tells us of the spiritual birth of the Word in our souls: “He came unto His own, and His own received Him not. But as many as received Him, He gave them power to be made the sons of God, to them that believe in His name, who are born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.”¹⁵⁷⁹ He gave them to become children of God by adoption, as He is the Son of God by nature. Our sonship is a figure of His, for we read in the same chapter: “And of His fullness we all have received, and grace for grace.”¹⁵⁸⁰

To show us how He wishes to live in us, the Son of God says to us: “If anyone love Me, he will keep My word. And My Father will love him, and We will come to him, and will make Our abode with him.”¹⁵⁸¹ It is not only the created gift of grace that will come, it is the divine Persons: the Father, the Son, and also the Holy Ghost promised by the Savior to His disciples.

Instead of daily reciting the Credo and the Gloria in a mechanical manner, instead of almost mechanically saying the prologue of the Fourth Gospel, we should live more profoundly by this very substantial abridgment of divine revelation. The spirit of faith should thus, while growing, normally give us in ever greater measure the meaning of the mystery of Christ, the supernatural meaning that should gradually become penetrating and sweet contemplation, the source of peace and joy, according to St. Paul’s words: “Rejoice in the Lord always.... And the peace of God, which surpasseth all understanding; keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.”¹⁵⁸²

A PRACTICAL MANNER OF LIVING BY THE SPIRIT OF FAITH

We should live by the spirit of faith by judging all things under its superior light, thus considering God first of all, then our own soul, next our neighbor, and all the events of life.

Is it necessary to say that we should consider God in the light of faith? Unfortunately, it is only too necessary. Do we not often consider God Himself in the light of our prejudices, our very human sentiments, our petty passions, contrary to the testimony that He Himself gives us in Scripture? Does it not happen even in prayer that we listen to ourselves, that we ascribe to the Lord our own reflections which are more or less inspired by our self-love? In hours of presumption, are we not inclined to think that the divine mercy is for us, and divine justice for those who do not please us? In moments of discouragement, on the contrary, do we not in practice doubt the love of God for us, and His boundless mercy? We often disfigure the spiritual physiognomy of God, considering it from the point of view of our egoism, and not from that of salvation, under the true light of divine revelation.

From the point of view of faith, God appears not through the movements of our self-love, but in the mirror of the mysteries of the life and passion of the Savior and in that of the life of the Church, renewed daily by the Eucharist. Then the eye of faith, which St. Catherine of Siena often speaks of, is increasingly purified by the mortification of the senses, of inordinate passions, of personal judgment and self-will. Only then does this blindfold of pride gradually fall away, this veil which hinders us from glimpsing divine things or allows only their shadows and difficulties to appear. Often we consider the truths of faith in the same way as people who see the stained-glass windows of a cathedral only from without; it is under the interior light that we should learn to contemplate them.

We should consider ourselves in the light of faith. If we see ourselves only under a natural light, we discover in ourselves natural qualities that we often exaggerate. Then contact with reality, with trial, shows us our exaggeration; and we fall into

depression or discouragement.

In the light of faith we would recognize the supernatural treasures that God placed in us by baptism and increased by Communion. We would daily realize a little better the value of sanctifying grace, of the indwelling of the Blessed Trinity in us; we would consider what the fruit of a fervent Communion should be; the grandeur of the Christian vocation, in the light of the precept of love, would become increasingly apparent to us.

We would also see more clearly the obstacles that hinder the development of grace in us: the levity that makes us forget we have in us the seed of eternal life, and a foolish pride, completely contrary to the spirit of wisdom. From this higher point of view, we would not delay in discovering in ourselves two things that are exceedingly important for us to know: our predominant fault and our principal attraction of grace, the black and the white, what must be destroyed and what should grow.

But it is our neighbor especially whom we forget to consider in the light of faith. We see him in the light of reason, which is deformed by our prejudices, egoism, pride, jealousies, and other passions. Consequently we approve in our neighbor what pleases us from a human point of view, what is conformed to our natural tastes or to our whims, what is useful to us, what makes us important, what our neighbor owes us. As a result, we condemn in him what annoys us, often what renders him superior to us, what offends us. How many rash, harsh, pitiless judgments, how many more or less conscious calumnies spring from this gaze that is darkened by selflove and pride!

If we could see our neighbor in the light of faith, with a pure spiritual gaze, what profit for him and for us! Then we would see in our superiors the representatives of God; we would obey them wholeheartedly without criticism, as we would our Lord Himself. In people who are naturally not congenial to us, we would see souls redeemed by the blood of Christ, who are part of His mystical body and perhaps nearer to His Sacred Heart than we are. Our supernatural gaze would pierce the opaque envelope of flesh and blood which prevents us from seeing the souls that surround us. Often we live for long years in the company of beautiful souls without ever suspecting it. We must merit to see souls in order to love them deeply and sincerely. Had we this love, we could then tell them salutary truths and hear such truths from them.

Similarly, if we saw in the light of faith persons who naturally please us, we would occasionally discover in them supernatural virtues that would greatly elevate and purify our affection. With benevolence we would also see the obstacles to the perfect reign of our Lord in them, and we could with true charity give them friendly advice or receive it from them in order to advance seriously in the way of God.

Lastly, we should see all the events of our lives, whether agreeable or painful, in the light of faith in order to live truly by the spirit of faith. We are often content to see the felicitous or unfortunate occurrences, as well as the facts of daily life, under their sensible aspect, which is accessible to the senses of the animal, or from the point of view of our more or less deformed reason. Rarely do we consider them from the supernatural point of view which would show us, as St. Paul says, that “to them that love God all things work together unto good,”¹⁵⁸³ even contradictions, the most painful and unforeseen vexations, even sin, says St. Augustine, if we humble ourselves for it.

In the injustices of men which we may have to undergo, we would also often discover the justice of God and, when wrongly accused of faults, we would see a well-merited punishment for hidden sins for which no one reproves us. We would also comprehend the meaning of the divine trials and of the purification which God has in view when He sends them to us.

We shall speak farther on of the passive purification of faith by certain of these trials, which free this theological virtue from all alloy and bring into powerful relief its formal motive: the first revealing Truth. Before reaching this stage, let us grow in faith, not judging everything from the sole point of view of reason. We must know how to renounce certain inferior lights or quasi-lights, that we may receive others that are far higher. The sun must set to enable us to see the stars in the depths of the heavens; likewise we must renounce the misuse of reason, which may be called practical rationalism, that we may discover the highly superior splendor of the great mysteries of faith and live profoundly by them.¹⁵⁸⁴

Confidence in God; Its Certitude

Since we have spoken of the spirit of faith, it is fitting that we consider what hope in God, or confidence in Him, should be in proficient, and that we state precisely what must be understood by the certitude of hope, which is based on that of faith and has a character *sui generis* which it is important to note.

Infused hope, no less than faith, is necessary to salvation and perfection. Moreover, to have a generous interior life, it is not sufficient to hope in God weakly and intermittently, as so many Christians do. His often obscure and occasionally disconcerting good pleasure must be loved, accepted with a spirit of filial submission, and the divine help awaited with a firm, humble, and persevering confidence.

DEFECTS TO BE AVOIDED

In connection with this virtue, we should avoid two contrary defects: presumption and discouragement. By noting them at the beginning of our discussion, we may see more clearly the true nature of hope, which rises like a summit between these opposing deviations.

There are two kinds of presumption: either man relies excessively on his own powers, like the Pelagians, not asking as much as he should for the help of God, not recalling sufficiently the necessity of grace for every salutary act; or, on the other hand, he expects from the divine mercy what God cannot grant: for example, pardon without true repentance, or eternal life without any effort to merit it. These two forms of presumption are mutually contradictory, since the first presumes on our strength, whereas the second expects from God what He has in no way promised.

Moreover, when trial and contradiction come, the presumptuous fall into the opposite defect, discouragement, as if the difficult good (*bonum arduum*), which is the object of hope, becomes inaccessible. Discouragement might lead to spiritual sloth, to *acedia*, which makes a man judge the work of sanctification too difficult and turns him away from every effort in this direction. He might thus even fall into despair. Many souls oscillate thus between presumption and discouragement, and never succeed in arriving, at least practically, at a true notion of Christian hope and in living by it as they should.

THE TRUE NATURE OF CHRISTIAN HOPE

Less is said about the virtue of hope than about faith and charity. Yet hope is of great importance. Most certainly Christian hope, as an infused and theological virtue, is essentially supernatural, and consequently immensely surpasses the natural desire to be happy and also a natural knowledge of the divine goodness.

By infused hope we tend toward eternal life, toward supernatural beatitude, which is nothing less than the possession of God: seeing God immediately as He sees Himself, loving Him as He loves Himself. We tend toward Him, relying on the divine help which He has promised us. The formal motive of hope is not our effort, it is God our Helper (*Deus auxiliator et auxilians*), according to His mercy, His promises, His omnipotence.^{[1585](#)}

Thus we desire God for ourselves, but first for Himself; for He is the last End of the act of hope, which should, moreover, be vivified by charity:^{[1586](#)} in other words, by hope, we desire God, our last End, not by subordinating Him to ourselves, like the food necessary to our subsistence, but by subordinating ourselves to Him. Thus it is evident, in contradistinction to the teaching of the quietists, that hope, although inferior to charity, contains nothing inordinate. It is a lofty virtue, though not the greatest of all.

Since, in fact, among the moral virtues, acquired magnanimity, and especially infused magnanimity, has a high place, so far as it makes us tend to great things (as we see in the founders of religious orders, in their works and struggles); with even greater reason, infused hope is a lofty virtue that makes us tend not only toward great things, but also toward God Himself to be possessed for eternity. This truth is emphasized by the fact that hope does not make us desire only an inferior degree of supernatural beatitude, but eternal life itself without fixing the degree. Indeed it leads us to advance always more generously toward God by giving us a greater desire for Him.

THE CERTITUDE OF HOPE

In this tendency of hope toward eternal life, there is at one and the same time a mystery still unknown and a certitude, about the nature of which some are deceived. St. Thomas explains it clearly, as he also explains the different types of certitude: those of

knowledge,¹⁵⁸⁷ faith,¹⁵⁸⁸ prudence,¹⁵⁸⁹ and the gift of wisdom.¹⁵⁹⁰

He raises first the following objection:¹⁵⁹¹ No man can be certain of his salvation without a special revelation,¹⁵⁹² which is rare; it seems, therefore, that hope cannot be certain. Moreover, it is not true that all who hope will be saved; it happens that some among them become discouraged in time and finally are lost. It seems, therefore, that hope is not truly certain.

In this problem, there is the element of the unknown, a mystery; yet hope remains certain. This mystery with its light and shade is one of the most beautiful in Christian teaching. As St. Thomas shows clearly, the certitude of hope differs from that of faith since it is not a certitude of the intellect, but a certitude shared in the will and in its aspect as a tendency. "Certitude," says the holy doctor, "is essentially in the cognitive faculty; but it is also by participation in all that is moved infallibly to its end by the cognitive power.... In this way we say that nature works with certainty, since it is moved by the divine intellect which moves everything with certainty to its end (the bee builds surely its hive and makes honey).... Thus too, hope tends with certitude to its end, as though sharing in the certitude of faith, which is in the cognitive faculty."¹⁵⁹³ Likewise, in the order of human affairs, when we have taken the train for Rome, without being absolutely sure of arriving, we are certain of going in the right direction, and we hope to reach the end of our journey.

In other words, by certain hope we have not as yet the certitude of our future salvation, which is not revealed to us (for that we would need a special revelation), but we tend certainly toward salvation, under the infallible direction of faith and according to the promises of God, "who never commands the impossible, but who orders us to do what lies in our power and to ask for help for what we cannot do."¹⁵⁹⁴ The certitude of Christian hope is not, therefore, as yet the certitude of salvation, but it is the firmest kind of certitude that we are tending toward salvation. From this statement spring many practical conclusions on the qualities or properties of Christian hope, which should grow in us with hope.

THE QUALITIES OF CHRISTIAN HOPE

How should we hope in God to avoid the twofold presumption that we have spoken of and the discouragement that often follows it? The Council of Trent tells us: "All should have a very firm confidence in the help of God. For if men do not fail to correspond to divine grace, as God Himself has begun the work of salvation in us, He will finish it, working in us 'both to will and to accomplish.'¹⁵⁹⁵ However, 'He that thinketh himself to stand, let him take heed lest he fall'¹⁵⁹⁶ and 'with fear and trembling work out his salvation,'¹⁵⁹⁷ In labors, vigils, prayer, alms, fasts, purity,¹⁵⁹⁸ according to these words of the Apostle: 'For if you live according to the flesh, you shall die: but if by the Spirit you mortify the deeds of the flesh, you shall live.'¹⁵⁹⁹ From this admirable doctrine it follows that Christian hope should have two qualities or properties: it should be laborious to avoid the presumption which expects the divine reward without working for it; and it should be firm, invincible, to avoid discouragement.

Hope should be laborious because it tends toward a possible, difficult good, but a difficult, arduous future good, which is the object of merit. We must work at our salvation, first of all, to preserve in ourselves a living hope and not a vain presumption. We must work in the spirit of humility and abnegation to preserve a keen desire for eternal life, for God, our beatitude, a desire whose ardor would be destroyed by the intensity of contrary desires, like those of earthly joys and of ambition. This keen desire for heaven, this ardent desire for God, is too rare even among good Christians. And yet, if there is one thing we should desire with a holy ardor, is it not the divine union? What will we desire ardently, therefore, if we do not have a keen desire for God?

Furthermore, we must work to merit eternal beatitude: to see God as He sees Himself and to love Him as He loves Himself. Without doubt, we need grace to attain this end; but it is given to us, says St. Augustine, not that we may do nothing, but that we may work with continually increasing generosity until the end: "He that shall persevere unto the end, he shall be saved."¹⁶⁰⁰ "For he also that striveth for the mastery is not crowned, except he strive lawfully."¹⁶⁰¹ We must work to remove the obstacles of concupiscence, of sloth, pride, dissension, ambition, and to observe the precepts with always greater perfection according to the spirit of our vocation.

Laborious hope together with the gift of fear, or the fear of sin, saves us from presumption. By this virtue and this gift of fear, is preserved the equilibrium of the spirit in divine things, as a little lower in the order of the virtues, not theological but moral, spiritual balance is safeguarded by humility and magnanimity, which are like the two sides of a scale, that we may escape falling either into pride or into pusillanimity.¹⁶⁰²

Lastly, in the midst of difficulties that may present themselves until death, and even until our entrance into heaven, hope should be most firm and invincible. It should not be broken by temptations, trials, or the sight of our sins. It should never yield to temptations coming from the world, the flesh, or the devil: "If God be for us, who is against us?"¹⁶⁰³ God never commands the impossible; more than that, as St. Paul says: "God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that which you are able; but will make also with temptation issue, that you may be able to bear it."¹⁶⁰⁴

Hope should not be broken either by the trials which the Lord sends to purify us and to make us work for the salvation of

souls. In time of trial we should not forget that the formal motive of hope is God our Helper, *Deus auxilians*, according to His mercy, promises, and omnipotence. Because Job had the virtue of hope, he declared: “Although He should kill me, I will trust in Him.”¹⁶⁰⁵ And in the Epistle to the Romans we read: “Who against hope believed in hope; that he [Abraham] might be made the father of many nations, according to that which was said to him: ‘So shall thy seed be.’”¹⁶⁰⁶ Contrary to every human hope, in spite of his great age, he hoped, and even prepared himself for the immolation of his son Isaac, the son of promise, from whom his posterity was to be born.

The aim of the purification of hope is to free the virtue from all alloy of inordinate self-love, but not to lead us to the sacrifice of the desire of our salvation, as the quietists declared. Such a sacrifice would be equivalent to renouncing our love of God above all for all eternity, and, by sacrificing hope under the pretext of pure love, we would also sacrifice charity. We must, on the contrary, hope against all hope.

Finally, confidence should not be broken by the sight and the memory of our sins. Therefore St. Catherine of Siena used to say: “Never consider your past sins except in the light of infinite mercy, so that the memory of them may not discourage you, but may lead you to place your confidence in the infinite value of the Savior’s merits.”

St. Teresa of the Child Jesus stated that her immense confidence in God did not come from the knowledge of her innocence, but from the thought of the infinite mercy and infinite merits of the Savior, and that, even if she were the greatest wretch on earth, her confidence in God would not for that reason be diminished. This is a magnificent way of stating that the formal motive of hope, a theological virtue, is not our effort or our innocence, but God our Helper, *Deus auxilians*, helpful Mercy.

ADMIRABLE EFFECTS OF LIVING HOPE CONFIRMED BY TRIALS

After various trials, hope, which has been greatly strengthened, surmounts all obstacles. According to St. Paul: “We... glory in the hope of the glory of the sons of God. And not only so; but we glory also in tribulation, knowing that tribulation worketh patience; and patience trial; and trial hope; and hope confoundeth not, because the charity of God is poured forth in our hearts by the Holy Ghost who is given to us.”¹⁶⁰⁷

Commenting on St. Paul’s words, St. Thomas says: “St. Paul shows us first of all the grandeur of hope by the grandeur of the thing hoped for (that is, eternal life), then the power, the vehemence of hope. In fact, he who strongly hopes for something, willingly bears for that reason difficulties and bitterness. And therefore the sign that we have a strong hope in Christ is that we glory not only in the thought of future glory, but in our tribulations and the trials which we have to bear. ‘Through many tribulations we must enter into the kingdom of God.’¹⁶⁰⁸ Moreover, the Apostle St. James says: ‘My brethren, count it all joy, when you shall fall into divers temptations, knowing that the trying of your faith worketh patience.’¹⁶⁰⁹ And from the fact that a man bears tribulation patiently, he is rendered excellent, *probatus*. We read of the just in the Book of Wisdom: ‘Though in the sight of men they suffered torments, their hope is full of immortality. Afflicted in few things, in many they shall be well rewarded: because God hath tried them, and found them worthy of Himself. As gold in the furnace He hath proved them, and as a victim of a holocaust He hath received them.’¹⁶¹⁰ Thus trial causes hope to grow, and hope does not deceive us, for God does not abandon those who trust Him. ‘No one hath hoped in the Lord, and hath been confounded.’¹⁶¹¹ It is evident that the Lord will not refuse Himself to those who love Him, to those to whom He has already given His Son.... He has prepared eternal beatitude for those who love Him above all else.”¹⁶¹²

From what has just been said we perceive that, contrary to the opinion held by the quietists, in great trials, instead of sacrificing our desire of salvation, we must “hope against all hope” while loving God for Himself. Thus charity increases greatly; it becomes pure love which, far from destroying confidence, vivifies it.

Certainly these trials serve to purify hope of all self-love, of the desire of our own perfection, so far as it is ours. A servant of God who had desired to become a saint later expressed her desire under a less personal and more objective form: “Lord, may Your kingdom come more and more profoundly in me.” She was happy not to have the reputation of being a saint, happy to be but little esteemed by those about her; she thus aspired truly to be always more closely united to our Lord, to be more loved by Him. Thus hope grew as it was being purified.

So Abraham, the father of believers, hoped, when he was tried and prepared to sacrifice his son Isaac. He did not cease to believe that this child was the son of promise, that his posterity would be greatly blessed, “accounting that God is able to raise up even from the dead.”¹⁶¹³

St. Philip Neri used to pray: “I thank Thee with my whole heart, Lord God, that things do not go as I should like them to, but as Thou dost wish. It is better that they should go according to Thy way, which is better than mine.”

St. Nicholas of Flue admirably expressed in a prayer the union of firmest hope and of pure love: “Lord, take from me all that hinders me from drawing near to Thee; give me all that will lead me to Thee. Take me from myself and give me entirely to Thyself.” We can also say, as an expression of hope and pure love: “Give Thyself, Lord, entirely to me, that I may love Thee purely and forever.”

As a practical conclusion, let us remember that in our lives there are two parallel series of daily facts: that of the outward events which succeed one another from morning to night, and that of the actual graces which are offered to us and even bestowed on us from moment to moment that we may draw from these occurrences, whether pleasurable or painful, the greatest spiritual profit. If we thought often of this fact, there would be realized increasingly in our lives St. Paul's statement: "To them that love God all things work together unto good,"¹⁶¹⁴ even annoyances, rebuffs, and contradictions, which are so many occasions of lifting our hearts toward God in a spirit of faith and confidence in Him.

St. Francis de Sales says in his Second Conference on Hope: "Although we do not feel confidence in God, we must not fail to make acts of hope. Distrust of ourselves and of our own strength should be accompanied by humility and faith, which obtain the grace of confidence in God. The more unfortunate we are, the more we should have confidence in Him who sees our state, and who can come to our assistance. No one trusts in God without reaping the fruits of his hope. The soul should remain tranquil and rely on Him who can give the increase to what has been sown and planted. We must not cease to labor, but in toiling we must trust in God for the success of our works."

The love of Conformity to the Divine Will

Having spoken of the spirit of faith and of trust in God, we must consider what the progress of charity should be in the illuminative way, that the soul may pass from the mercenary or interested love of the imperfect to perfect charity. Consequently we shall discuss the signs of imperfect love, then those of the progress of charity, the relations of charity with our natural dispositions, and its progressive conformity to the divine will.

THE SIGNS OF IMPERFECT LOVE

St. Catherine of Siena indicates clearly in her Dialogue¹⁶¹⁵ the signs of mercenary love; we quoted this passage earlier in this work.¹⁶¹⁶ The saint says in substance that love remains imperfect in the just man when, in the service of God, he is still too much attached to his own interests, when he still seeks himself and has an excessive desire of his own satisfaction.

The same imperfection is then found in his love of his neighbor. In loving his neighbor, he seeks self, takes complacency, for example, in his own natural activity, in which there is rash haste, egoistical eagerness, occasionally followed by coldness when his love is not returned, and he believes that he sees in others ingratitude, a failure to appreciate the benefits he bestows on them.

In the same chapter the saint points out that the imperfection of this love of God and souls is clearly shown by the fact that, as soon as we are deprived of the consolations that we had in God, this love no longer suffices us and can no longer subsist; it languishes and often grows colder and colder as God withdraws His spiritual consolations and sends us struggles and contradictions in order to exercise us in virtue. Nevertheless He acts thus only to put our inordinate self-love to death and to cause the charity that we received at baptism to grow. This charity should become a living flame of love and notably elevate all our legitimate affections.

THE NATURE OF CHARITY AND THE MARKS OF ITS PROGRESS

The signs of the progress of charity are deduced from its very nature. Scripture tells us in several places that the just man is the “friend of God.”¹⁶¹⁷ St. Thomas,¹⁶¹⁸ explaining ‘these words of Scripture, shows us that charity is essentially a love of friendship we should have for God because of His infinite goodness which radiates on us, vivifying us and drawing us to Himself.

Every true friendship, St. Thomas tells us, implies three qualities: it is first of all a love of benevolence by which a man wishes good to another, as to himself; in this it differs from the love of concupiscence or of covetousness, by which one desires a good for oneself, as one desires a fruit or the bread necessary to subsistence. We ought to wish our friends the good which is suitable for them, and we should wish that God may reign profoundly over minds and hearts.

Moreover, every true friendship presupposes a love of mutual benevolence; it is not sufficient that it exist on the part of one person only. The two friends should wish each other well. And the more elevated the good which they wish each other, the more noble is this friendship. It is based on virtue when friends wish each other not only what is pleasant or useful like the goods of earth and fortune, but what is virtuous—fidelity to duty, progress in the love of moral and spiritual good.

Lastly, to constitute a true friendship, this mutual love of benevolence does not suffice. We may, in fact, have benevolence for a person at a distance, whom we know only through hearsay, and that person may have the same benevolence for us; we are not, however, friends for that reason. Friendship requires in addition a community of life (*convivere*). It implies that people know each other, love each other, live together, spiritually at least, by the exchange of most secret thoughts and feelings. Friendship thus conceived tends to a very close union of thought, feeling, willing, prayer, sacrifice, and action.

These three characters of true friendship—the love of benevolence, mutual love, and community of life—are precisely found in the charity which unites us to God and to souls in Him.

The natural inclination which already subsists in the depths of our will, in spite of original sin, inclines us to love God, the Author of our nature, more than ourselves and above all, as in an organism the part loves the whole more than itself, as the hand exposes itself naturally to preserve the body and especially the head.¹⁶¹⁹ But this natural inclination, attenuated by original sin, cannot, without the grace which heals (*gratia sanans*), lead us to an efficacious love of God above all things.¹⁶²⁰

Far above this natural inclination, we received in baptism sanctifying grace and charity with faith and hope. And charity is precisely this love of mutual benevolence which makes us wish God, the Author of grace, the good that is suitable to Him, His

supreme reign over souls, as He wishes our good for time and eternity. Such a desire is indeed a friendship based on community of life, for God has communicated to us a participation in His intimate life by giving us grace, the seed of eternal life.¹⁶²¹ By grace, we are “born of God,” as we read in the prologue of St. John’s Gospel; we resemble God as children resemble their father. And this community of life implies a permanent union, which is at times only habitual, for example, during sleep; at others, when we make an act of love of God, it is actual. Then there is truly community of life, the meeting of the paternal love of God for His child, and of the love of the child for the Father who vivifies it and blesses it. This is especially true when, by a special inspiration, the Lord inclines us to an act of infused love, which we could not make with common, actual grace. There is a spiritual communion, the prelude of the spiritual communion of heaven, which will no longer be measured by time, but by the indivisible instant of changeless eternity.

Such is indeed the friendship with God which begins on earth. Because Abraham had this love, he was called the friend of God. For the same reason the Book of Wisdom tells us that the just man lives in the divine friendship, and Christ says: “I will not now call you servants... but I have called you friends.” By his analysis of the distinctive marks of friendship, St. Thomas only explains these divine words; he does not deduce a new truth; he explains revealed truth and enables us to penetrate it deeply.¹⁶²²

Charity, even in its least degree, makes us love God more than ourselves and more than His gifts with an efficacious love of esteem, because God is infinitely better than we and than every created gift. Efficacious love of esteem is not always felt, for example, in aridity; and at the beginning it has not yet the intensity or spontaneity that it has in the perfect, and especially in the blessed. A good Christian mother feels her love for her child, whom she holds in her arms, more than her love for God, whom she does not see; yet, if she is truly Christian, she loves the Lord with an efficacious love of esteem more than her child. For this reason, theologians distinguish commonly between appreciative love (love of esteem) and intensive love, which is generally greater for loved ones whom we see than for those who are at a distance. But, with the progress of charity, the love of esteem for God becomes more intense and is known as zeal; in heaven its impetuosity will exceed that of all our strongest affections.

Such is the nature of the virtue of charity; it is the principle of a love of God that is like the flowing of our hearts toward Him who draws us and vivifies us. Thus we ultimately find a great gratification in Him, desiring that He may reign more and more profoundly in our souls and in the souls of others. For this love of God, knowledge is not necessary; to know our heavenly Father through faith suffices. We cannot cease to love Him without beginning our own destruction, and we can cease to love Him by any mortal sin.

The efficacious love of esteem of God above all else, which may subsist in great aridity of the sensible faculties, is very much opposed to sentimentality, which is the affectation of a love one does not have.

Since such is the nature of charity, what are the indications of its progress? There are, first of all, the signs of the state of grace: (1) not to be conscious of any mortal sin; (2) not to seek earthly things, pleasures, wealth, honors; (3) to take pleasure in the presence of God, to love to think of Him, adore Him, pray to Him, thank Him, ask His pardon, talk to Him, aspire to Him.¹⁶²³ To these signs must be added the following: (4) to wish to please God more than all those whom one loves; (5) to love one’s neighbor effectively, in spite of the defects which are in him, as they are in us, and to love him because he is the child of God and is beloved by Him. Then one loves God in one’s neighbor, and one’s neighbor in God. Christ says: “By this shall all men know that you are My disciples, if you have love one for another.”¹⁶²⁴

These signs are summed up in St. Paul’s words: “Charity is patient, is kind; charity envieth not, dealeth not perversely, is not puffed up, is not ambitious, seeketh not her own, is not provoked to anger, thinketh no evil; rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth with the truth; beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things.”¹⁶²⁵

Happy is the heart that loves God in this manner, without any other pleasure than that which it has in pleasing God! If the soul is faithful, it will one day taste the delights of this love and take an unequaled happiness in Him who is limitless good, the infinite plenitude of good, into which the soul may plunge and lose itself as in a spiritual ocean without ever meeting with any obstacle. Thus the just man begins to love God with a love of esteem (appreciative love) above all things, and he tends to love Him above all intensively with the ardent zeal which perseveres in aridity in the midst of trials and persecutions.

THE LOVE OF GOD AND OUR NATURAL DISPOSITIONS

But, it will be objected, there are harsh, rude, bitter characters, little inclined to affection. How, therefore, does what we have just said apply to them? St. Francis de Sales replies to this objection as St. Thomas does, stating that one cannot admit, without falling into the naturalism of the Pelagians, that the distribution of divine love is made to men according to their natural qualities and dispositions.¹⁶²⁶ St. Francis de Sales adds:

The supernatural love which God by His goodness pours into our hearts... is in the supreme point of the spirit..., which is independent of every natural character.... It is, nevertheless, true that naturally loving souls, once they are well purified of the love of creatures, do marvels in holy love, love finding a great ease in dilating itself in all

the faculties of their hearts. Thence proceeds a very agreeable sweetness, which does not appear in those whose souls are harsh, melancholy, and untractable.

Nevertheless, if two persons, one of whom is loving and gentle, the other naturally fretful and bitter, have an equal charity, they will doubtless love God equally, but not similarly. The heart that is naturally gentle will love more easily, amiably, sweetly, but not more solidly, or more perfectly. Thus the love which will arise among the thorns and repugnances of a harsh and cold nature, will be braver and more glorious, as the other will be more delightful and charming.¹⁶²⁷

It matters little, then, whether one is naturally disposed to love when it is a question of a supernatural love by which one acts only supernaturally. Only, Theotime, I would gladly say to all men: Oh, mortals! If your hearts are inclined to love, why do you not aspire to celestial and divine love? But, if you are harsh and bitter of heart, poor souls, since you are deprived of natural love, why do you not aspire to supernatural love, which will lovingly be given you by Him who calls you in so holy a manner to love Him?¹⁶²⁸

From this doctrine on the relation of the life of grace and of our natural dispositions spring consequences of great importance in mystical theology.¹⁶²⁹

PROGRESSIVE CONFORMITY TO THE SIGNIFIED DIVINE WILL

The love of conformity consists in wishing all that the divine will signifies to us as being its intention.¹⁶³⁰ This will is signified to us by the precepts and by the counsels conformable to our vocation, and by events, some of which are painful and unexpected.¹⁶³¹ We are speaking of the signified divine will when we say in the Our Father: “Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.” Thus we see what progressive conformity to the divine will should be.

To love God in prosperity is good, provided that one does not love prosperity as much or more than God Himself. In any case, this is only an inferior degree of love, easy to all. When facility in the practice of duty ceases, to love the divine will in its commandments, counsels, inspirations, to live by it, constitutes a second degree which is more perfect and which recalls the words of Jesus: “My meat is to do the will of Him that sent Me.”¹⁶³²

But we must also imitate Christ in loving God in painful and unbearable things, in daily vexations and tribulations, which His providence permits in our lives for a higher good. And, indeed, we cannot truly love God unless we love these tribulations, not in themselves, but for the spiritual good which results from patience in bearing them. Consequently, to love sufferings and afflictions for the love of God is the highest degree of holy charity. Our adversities are then converted into good, for, as St. Paul says: “To them that love God [and who persevere in this love], all things work together unto good.”¹⁶³³

St. Francis de Sales¹⁶³⁴ remarks on the subject of ardent love that, according to Plato, it is poor, ragged, naked, pale, emaciated, homeless, always indigent; it sleeps out of doors on the hard ground, for it makes a man leave everything for the one he loves; it causes him to lose sleep and to aspire to an ever closer union. Plato spoke thus of natural love; but, adds the holy Bishop of Geneva, all of this is still truer of divine love when it wounds a soul deeply. Therefore, St. Paul wrote: “Even unto this hour we both hunger and thirst, and are naked, and are buffeted, and have no fixed abode.... We are made as the refuse of this world.”¹⁶³⁵

“Who reduced him to this state,” asks St. Francis de Sales, “except love? It was love which cast St. Francis of Assisi naked before his bishop and made him die naked on the ground. It was love that made him a beggar all his life. It was love that sent the great St. Francis Xavier, poor, indigent, tattered, here and there in the Indies;... it was love which reduced the great cardinal, St. Charles, archbishop of Milan, to such poverty... that he was (in his episcopal palace) like a dog in the house of his master.”

The love of conformity to the divine will is like a fire, the flames of which are the more beautiful and bright as they are fed with more delicate matter, for example, with drier, purer, and better wood. For this reason, says the same saint, every love that does not have its origin in the Savior’s passion is frivolous and dangerous.¹⁶³⁶ The death of Jesus, the supreme expression of His love for us, is the strongest incentive to our love of Him. Nothing satisfies our hearts as does the love of Jesus Christ, by the way of perfect spoliation which unites the soul very closely to the divine will.¹⁶³⁷

The love of conformity to the divine will signified by the precepts and counsels, and by events, enables us to abandon ourselves to the divine will of good pleasure, not yet manifested, on which our future depends.¹⁶³⁸ In this filial abandonment there is faith, hope, and love of God; it may be expressed as follows: “Lord, I trust in Thee!” From this comes the motto: “Fidelity and abandonment,” which preserves the balance between activity and passivity, above slothful quiet and restless and fruitless agitation. Abandonment is the way to follow; daily and hourly fidelity, the steps to take on this way. By fidelity in the light of the commandments, we enter the obscure mystery of the divine good pleasure, which is that of predestination.

We certainly do not possess all the love we need; therefore, the saints tell us, it is folly to expend our love inordinately upon creatures. The cooling of divine love comes from venial sin or from affection to venial sin. On the contrary, a generous act of charity merits and obtains for us immediately the increase of this infused virtue, which vivifies all the others and renders their acts meritorious. The increase of charity prepares us to see God better eternally and to love Him more intimately forever.

We should, therefore, deem as nothing all that we give to obtain the priceless treasure of the love of God, of ardent love. He alone gives to the human heart the interior charity that it lacks. Without Him our hearts are cold; we experience only the passing warmth of an intermittent fever.

When we give our love to God, He always gives us His. Indeed He forestalls us for, without His grace, we could not rise above our self-love; only grace, for which we should ask incessantly, just as we always need air in order to breathe, gives us true generosity.

During the journey toward eternity, we must never say that we have sufficient love of God. We should make continual progress in love. The traveler (viator) who advances toward God progresses with steps of love, as St. Gregory the Great says, that is, by ever higher acts of love. God desires that we should thus love Him more each day. The song of the journey toward eternity is a hymn of love, that of the holy liturgy, which is the voice of the Church; it is the song of the spouse of Christ.

It is not unfitting to tremble at times in the presence of God, but love must predominate. We must fear God filially through love, and not love Him through fear; therefore filial fear, that of sin, grows with charity, whereas servile fear, that of punishment, diminishes.

Our love of God grows by our carrying the cross. St. Francis de Sales declared: "The most generous and courageous characters are formed in crosses and afflictions, and cowardly souls are pleased only in prosperity. Moreover, the pure love of God is practiced far more easily in adversities than in comforts, for tribulation has nothing amiable about it except the hand of God who sends it... whereas prosperity has of itself attractions which charm our senses."¹⁶³⁹

As the love of conformity to the divine will grows, it renders sweet the sufferings on which it feeds; the soul then walks with assurance according to the words of the Savior: "He that followeth Me walketh not in darkness, but shall have the light of life."¹⁶⁴⁰

The love of God grows each time we mortify self-love. To desire ardently divine love, we must, therefore, retrench all that cannot be quickened by it. Growing thus, the love of God renders the virtues eminently more pleasing to God than they are by their own nature; the meritorious degree of their acts depends upon the degree of love. Thereby the accomplishment of our duties of state can be greatly sanctified and not a minute will be lost for eternity.¹⁶⁴¹

If a person has had a high degree of charity and has never sinned mortally, but his love has grown cool through some attachment to venial sin, he still keeps the treasure of lofty charity¹⁶⁴² although he has lost its radiation or fervor like a golden chalice that has become tarnished and covered with dust, or like a flame in a clouded glass shade. Therefore, it is important to remove as quickly as possible this dust, these spots, and restore to charity its fervor and radiation.

As a practical conclusion, let us consider how we can subordinate all our affections to the love of God. St. Francis de Sales tells us: "I can combat the desire of riches and mortal pleasures either by the scorn that they deserve or by the desire of immortal pleasures; and by this second means, sensual and earthly love will be destroyed by heavenly love.... Thus divine love supplants and subdues the affections and passions,"¹⁶⁴³ or places them at its service.

The love of conformity to the divine will leads to the love of complacency by which we rejoice over everything that contributes to the glory of God: we rejoice that He possesses infinite wisdom, limitless beatitude, that the whole universe is a manifestation of His goodness, and that the elect will glorify Him eternally. The love of complacency or of fruition is more particularly felt under a special inspiration of God: in this sense it is infused and passive; whereas the love of conformity of which we have spoken, may exist without this special inspiration, with common actual grace; from this point of view, it is called active.

For this reason certain authors have held that St. John of the Cross proposed in *The Ascent of Mount Carmel* the union of the love of conformity as the end of the ascetical life, and in *The Dark Night* and *The Living Flame* the union of the passive love of enjoyment as the end of the mystical life.

We, as well as many contemporary writers,¹⁶⁴⁴ think, on the contrary, that St. John of the Cross preserves the unity of the spiritual life by speaking, in all his works, of only one end of the normal development of the life of grace on earth, and of only one union and transformation of love, which, it is true, presents itself under two aspects. The first of these aspects is the entire conformity of our will to the will of God; but this active gift of self is normally accompanied by the communication of the divine life passively received, which is the second aspect. Therefore the normal term of the spiritual life is a state at once ascetical and mystical, in which the perfection of active love, manifested by the virtues, is joined to infused or passive love, which leads the soul to the summit of union. The way leading to this union should, consequently, be not only active but also passive; it implies both the active purification described in *The Ascent* and the passive purification spoken of in *The Dark Night*. They are two aspects of purification: in other words, what the soul should do, and what it should receive and bear. Thus the unity of the spiritual life is maintained, and perfect union is the normal prelude of the life of heaven.¹⁶⁴⁵

Fraternal Charity, Radiation of the Love of God

“And the glory which Thou hast given Me, I have given to them; that they may be one, as We also are one.”

John 17:22

The love of God, of which we have spoken, corresponds to the supreme precept; but there is a second precept which springs from the first: “Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself,”¹⁶⁴⁶ for the love of God. The love of neighbor is presented to us by our Lord as the necessary consequence, the radiation, the sign, of the love of God: “Love one another as I have loved you.... By this shall all men know that you are My disciples.”¹⁶⁴⁷ St. John even says: “If any man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar.”¹⁶⁴⁸

In the illuminative way of proficients, fraternal charity should therefore be one of the greatest signs of the progress of the love of God. Here we must insist on the formal motive for which charity should be practiced, so that it may not be confounded with, for example, simple amiability or natural comradeship, or with liberalism, which assumes the exterior appearances of charity but differs greatly from this infused virtue. Liberalism disregards the value of faith and of divine truth, whereas charity presupposes them as its basis. To see clearly the formal motive of fraternal charity, not only in a theoretical and abstract manner, but in a concrete and experimental manner, we shall examine why our love of God should extend to our neighbor, and how actually to make progress in fraternal charity. That we may look at the matter from a supernatural point of view, we shall consider the love of Jesus for us.

WHY OUR LOVE OF GOD SHOULD EXTEND TO OUR NEIGHBOR

Fraternal charity, which the Lord demands of us, differs immensely from the natural tendency which inclines us to do good in order to please others, which leads us also to love the kind, to hate those who do us evil, and to remain indifferent to others. Natural love makes us love our neighbor for his natural good qualities and for the benefits we receive from him; we find this love in good comradeship. The motive of charity is quite different and very much higher; the proof of it is in Christ's words: “Love your enemies: do good to them that hate you: and pray for them that persecute and calumniate you.... For if you love them that love you, what reward shall you have? Do not even the publicans this?... Be you therefore perfect, as also your heavenly Father is perfect.”¹⁶⁴⁹

We should love our enemies with the same supernatural, theological love as we have for God; for there are not two virtues of charity, the one toward God, the other toward our neighbor. There is only one virtue of charity, the first act of which has God, loved above all else, as its object; and its secondary acts have ourselves and our neighbor as their object. Hence this virtue is very superior to the great virtue of justice, and not only to commutative and distributive justice, but to legal or social justice and to equity.

But how is it possible for us to have a divine love for men, who, like ourselves, are so often imperfect? Theology replies with St. Thomas¹⁶⁵⁰ by a simple example: he who greatly loves his friend, loves the children of this friend with the same love; he loves them because he loves their father, and for his sake he wishes them well. For love of their father, he will, if necessary, come to their aid and pardon them if they have offended him.

Therefore, since all men are children of God by grace, or at least called to become so, we should love all men, even our enemies, with a supernatural love and desire the same eternal beatitude for them as for ourselves. We ought all to travel toward the same end, to make the same journey toward eternity, under the impulsion of the same grace, to live by the same love. Charity is thus a supernatural bond of perfection which unites us, as it should, to God and to our neighbor. It unites hearts at no matter what distance they may be; it leads us to love God in man and man in God.

The supernatural love of charity is rare among men because many seek their own interest primarily, and more readily comprehend the formula: “An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth.”

The precept of fraternal charity was greatly neglected before the time of Christ; consequently He had to insist on it. He did so from the very beginning of His preaching in the Sermon on the Mount,¹⁶⁵¹ and He continually reverted to it, especially in His last words before He died.¹⁶⁵² St. John, in his Epistles, and St. Paul repeatedly remind us of this precept. They show us that when charity enters the heart, it is followed by all the other virtues; it is meek, patient, and humble.¹⁶⁵³

But to love our neighbor supernaturally so far as he is the child of God or is called to become so, we must look upon him with the eyes of faith and tell ourselves that this person whose temperament and character are opposed to ours is “born, not of

blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but [as we are] of God,” or called to be born of Him, to share in the same divine life, in the same beatitude as we. Especially in a Christian milieu, we can and ought to tell ourselves in regard to persons who are less congenial to us that their souls are, in spite of everything, temples of the Holy Ghost, that they are members of the mystical body of Christ, nearer perhaps to His heart than we are; that they are living stones whom God works that He may give them a place in the heavenly Jerusalem. How can we fail to love our neighbor, if we truly love God, our common Father? If we do not love our neighbor, our love of God is a lie. On the contrary, if we love him, it is a sign that we truly love God, the Author of the grace that vivifies us.

A young Jew whom we knew, the son of a Vienna banker, one day had the opportunity to take vengeance on his family’s greatest enemy; as he was about to do so, he remembered the following words of Scripture, which he was in the habit of reading from time to time: “Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us.” Then, instead of taking vengeance, he fully pardoned his enemy and immediately received the grace of faith. He believed in the entire Gospel, and a short time afterward entered the Church and became a priest and religious. The precept of fraternal charity had illumined him.

Even about an adversary we must tell ourselves that we can and ought to love him with the same supernatural, theological love as we have for the divine Persons; for we ought to love in him the image of God, the divine life that he possesses or is called to receive, his supernatural being, the realization of the divine idea which presides over his destiny, the glory which he is called to give to God in time and eternity.

The following objection has occasionally been raised against this lofty doctrine: But is this truly loving man; is it not loving God only in man, as one admires a diamond in a jewel-case? Man naturally wishes to be loved for himself, but as man he cannot demand a divine love.

In reality, charity does not love God only in man, but man in God and man himself for God. It truly loves what man should be, an eternal part of the mystical body of Christ, and it does all in its power to make him attain heaven. It loves even what man already is through grace; and, if he has not grace, it loves his nature in him, not so far as it is fallen, unbalanced, unruly, hostile to grace, but so far as it is the image of God and capable of receiving the divine graft of grace that will increase its resemblance to God. In short, charity loves man himself, but for God, for the glory that he is called to give to God in time and eternity.

EFFICACY OF THE LOVE OF CHARITY

Whatever naturalism may say, in loving our neighbor in God and for God we do not love him less, we love him much more and far more perfectly. We do not love his defects; we put up with them; but we love in man all that is noble in him, all in him that is called to grow and to blossom in eternal life.

Far from being a Platonic and inefficacious love of our neighbor, charity, in growing, disposes us to judge him well and to condescend to his wishes in whatever is not contrary to the commandments of God. Condescension thus born of charity makes indifferent things good, and the painful things that we impose on ourselves for our neighbor, fruitful. There is great charity in thus preserving union with all by avoiding clashes which might arise, or by effecting a reconciliation as soon as possible. Charity that grows has thus a radiating goodness; it makes us continually love not only what is good for us, but what is good for our neighbor, even for our enemies, and what is good from the superior point of view of God, by desiring for others the goods which do not pass, and especially the sovereign Good and its inamissible possession. St. Thomas sums up all this briefly: “Now the aspect under which our neighbor is to be loved, is God, since what we ought to love in our neighbor is that he may be in God. Hence it is clear that it is specifically the same act whereby we love God, and whereby we love our neighbor. Consequently the habit of charity extends not only to the love of God, but also to the love of our neighbor.”¹⁶⁵⁴

Thus sight perceives light first of all and by it the seven colors of the rainbow. It could not perceive colors if it did not see light. Likewise we could not supernaturally love the children of God if we did not first supernaturally love God Himself, our common Father.¹⁶⁵⁵

Whereas justice inclines us to wish good to another inasmuch as he is another or distinct from us, charity makes us love him as “another self,” an alter ego, with a love of truly supernatural friendship, as the saints in heaven love one another.

THE COMPASS AND ORDER OF CHARITY

Therefore our charity should be universal: it should know no limits. It cannot exclude anyone on earth, in purgatory, or in heaven. It stops only before hell. It is only the damned that we cannot love, for they are no longer capable of becoming children of God. They hate Him eternally; they do not ask for pardon or for the grace to repent; hence they can no longer excite pity, for there is no longer in them the faintest desire to rise again. However, says St. Thomas, they are still the object of the divine mercy, in the sense that they are punished less than they deserve,¹⁶⁵⁶ a fact that gladdens our charity, which extends even that far.

Beyond the certain fact of damnation (and we are not certain of the damnation of anyone, except that of the fallen angels and of the “son of perdition”), charity is due to all; it knows no limits, it is broad, in a sense, like the heart of God. We had examples of this breadth of charity in the first World War when, on the battle front, a French boy at the point of death finished the Hail Mary begun by a young German who had just died beside him. The Blessed Virgin reunited these two youths, in spite of the harsh opposition of the war, in order to introduce them both into the supernal fatherland.

To be universal, charity does not have to be equal for all, and its progress in the illuminative way shows increasingly better what is called the order of charity, which admirably respects and elevates the order dictated by nature. Thus we should love God efficaciously above all else, at least with a love of esteem, if not with a love that is felt. Next we should love our own soul, then that of our neighbor, and finally our body, which we should sacrifice for the salvation of a soul, especially when we are obliged by our office to provide for it, as happens to those who have charge of souls. The order of charity appears more clearly as this virtue grows in us. We understand better and better that among our neighbors we should have a greater love of esteem for those who are better, nearer to God, although we love with a more sensible love those who are nearest to us through blood, marriage, vocation, or friendship.¹⁶⁵⁷ We also distinguish increasingly better the shades of the different friendships based on the bonds of family, country, or profession, or on bonds of an entirely spiritual order.¹⁶⁵⁸

The scale of values which appears more and more in this order of charity shows that God wishes to reign in our hearts, without excluding the legitimate affections which can and ought to be subordinated to the love we have for Him; then these affections are vivified, ennobled, purified, rendered more generous. Consequently the progress of charity does away with that *esprit de corps*, that collective egoism, that nosism which sometimes recalls painfully the chauvinism of certain narrow patriots who belittle their fatherland in their desire to magnify it. A spiritual daughter of St. Francis de Sales, Mother Louise de Ballon, who reformed the Bernardines and founded seventeen convents, used to say on this subject: “I can belong only to one order by profession and state; but I belong to all orders by inclination and love.... I confess ingenuously that I have always been afflicted at seeing monasteries envy each other..., at hearing some say that the good of the children of St. Augustine should not be for those of St. Benedict, and others say that the good of St. Benedict should not be given to the disciples of St. Bernard. Is it not the blood of Jesus Christ and not that of St. Augustine, St. Benedict, or St. Bernard, which purchased for their religious all the good that they possess? O my Lord! Establish solidly a good understanding among Your servants.... The different orders are composed of different bodies, but they should have only one heart, only one soul, as it was written of the first Christians.”¹⁶⁵⁹

Without this broad charity, we would fall into the defect, into the narrowness which St. Paul blamed in the Corinthians, some of whom said: “I indeed am of Paul; and another, I am of Apollo,” to which the saint replied: “What then is Apollo, and what is Paul? The ministers of Him whom you have believed; and to everyone as the Lord hath given. I have planted, Apollo watered, but God gave the increase. Therefore, neither he that planteth is anything, nor he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase.”¹⁶⁶⁰

In the same epistle the great Apostle writes: “Is Christ divided? Was Paul then crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?”¹⁶⁶¹ “Let no man therefore glory in men. For all things are yours, whether it be Paul or Apollo or Cephas or the world or life or death or things present or things to come; for all are yours; and you are Christ’s; and Christ is God’s.”¹⁶⁶²

Such indeed, above all individual or collective narrowness, is the admirable order of charity, as it should appear increasingly in the disinterested proficient, whose heart should enlarge in a sense, like the heart of God, by the very progress of charity, which is truly a participation in the divine life, in eternal love.

This growing charity ought to be not only affective but effective, not only benevolent but beneficent. The lives of the saints show that they understood the Master’s words: “This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.”¹⁶⁶³ Christ loved us even to the death of the cross; the saints loved their brethren even to the martyrdom of the heart, and often even to giving the testimony of their blood.

Such is fraternal charity, the extension or radiation of the love we should have for God. Similarly, humility in respect to our neighbor is the extension of the virtue that leads us to humble ourselves before God and before what is of God in all His works.

HOW TO MAKE PROGRESS IN FRATERNAL CHARITY

Occasions of failing in fraternal charity present themselves only too often even in the best surroundings; first of all, because of the defects of all who, though tending to perfection, have not reached it. Each of us is like a truncated pyramid that has not yet its summit. Our neighbor often seems so to us, and we forget that we appear in like manner to him; we see the mote in our neighbor’s eye, and do not see the beam in our own.

Moreover, if, by an impossibility, all our defects were suppressed before our entrance into heaven, occasions of clashes and offenses would still subsist because of the diversity of temperaments—bilious, nervous, lymphatic, or sanguine; by reason of the diversity of characters—some inclined to indulgence, others to severity; because of the diversity of minds—some inclined

to view things as a whole, others in the minutest detail; by reason again of the difference in education; because of nervous fatigue; and finally because of the demon, who takes pleasure in causing division that he may destroy our Lord's work of truth, unity, and peace.

The devil intervenes more directly in certain excellent centers in order to obstruct the great good that might be done there. He seeks much more directly to disturb such groups than he does less good or positively evil centers, where he already rules through the maxims there diffused and the examples found there. As we see in the Gospel and the lives of the saints, the enemy of souls sows cockle among the best, placing in imaginations, as it were, a magnifying glass which transforms a grain of sand into a mountain.

We should also keep in mind that Providence designedly leaves among the good many occasions for humility and for the exercise of fraternal charity. It is in weakness that the grace of God manifests its power and that our virtue is perfected; our weaknesses humiliate us, and those of others exercise us.

Only in heaven will every occasion of conflict completely disappear, because the blessed, illumined by the divine light, see in God all that they should think, will, and do. On earth the saints themselves may enter into conflict, and occasionally no one yields for some time, because each is persuaded in conscience that he must maintain his point of view; that he may indeed yield in regard to his rights, but not in respect to his obligations. The case of St. Charles Borromeo and of St. Philip Neri illustrates this point. They could not come to an agreement on the foundation of one order; and, as a matter of fact, in this case the Lord wished two religious families instead of one.

In the midst of so many difficulties, how should fraternal charity grow? It should grow especially in two ways: by benevolence and beneficence; that is, first by considering our neighbor in the light of faith that we may discover in him the life of grace, at least what is good in his nature; then by loving our neighbor effectively, and that in many ways: by putting up with his defects, rendering him service, returning good for evil, praying for union of minds and hearts.

First of all, we should view our neighbor in the light of faith that we may find in him the life of grace, or at least the image of God a ready graven in the very nature of his spiritual and immortal soul. Since charity, in its aspect as love of God, presupposes faith in God, in its aspect as love of neighbor it assumes that we consider him in the light of faith and not only in that of our eyes of flesh, or in that of a reason more or less deformed by egoism. We need a pure gaze fitted to see the divine life of others under an envelope that at times is thick and opaque. We see the supernatural being of our neighbor if we merit to do so, if we are detached from self.

In this connection we would do well to face the fact that often what irritates us against our neighbor is not serious sins against God, but rather defects of temperament which sometimes subsist despite real virtue. We would perhaps easily put up with sinners who are quite removed from God but naturally amiable, whereas advanced souls are occasionally very "trying" to us. We must, therefore, resolve to look at souls in the light of faith that we may discover in them what is pleasing to God, what He loves in them, and what we should love in them.

This higher light produces benevolence, whereas rash judgment most seriously opposes this benevolent view. For this reason Christ insists so strongly on this point in the Sermon on the Mount: "Judge not, that you may not be judged. For with what judgment you judge, you shall be judged; and with what measure you mete, it shall be measured to you again. And why seest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, and seest not the beam that is in thy own eye?... Thou hypocrite, cast out first the beam out of thy own eye, and then shalt thou see to cast out the mote out of thy brother's eye."¹⁶⁶⁴

It should be clearly noted that rash judgment is not a simple unfavorable impression; it is a judgment. It consists in affirming evil on a slight indication; in reality a person sees two objects, but because of pride affirms that he sees four. If this judgment is fully deliberate and consented to in a serious matter, that is, judging one's neighbor guilty of a mortal sin, the one who judges, himself commits a mortal sin.¹⁶⁶⁵ Consequently, says St. Thomas, if we cannot avoid certain suspicions, we should take care not to make a firm and definitive judgment on slight indications.¹⁶⁶⁶

Rash judgment, properly so called, is a sin against justice, especially when it is outwardly expressed by words or acts.¹⁶⁶⁷ Our neighbor has, in fact, a right to his reputation; next to the right which he has to do his duty, he has the right to uphold his good name more than to defend the right to property. We should respect this right of others to their reputation if we wish our own to be respected.

Moreover, rash judgment is often false. How can we judge with certainty of the interior intentions of a person whose doubts, errors, difficulties, temptations, good desires, or repentance, we do not know? How can we claim to know better than he what he says to God in prayer? How can we judge justly when we do not have the details of the case? Even if a rash judgment is true, it is a sin against justice because, in judging thus, a man arrogates to himself a jurisdiction which is not his to exercise. God alone is capable of judging with certainty the secret intentions of hearts, or those that are not sufficiently manifested. Hence even the Church does not judge them: "de internis non judicat."

Rash judgment is likewise a sin against charity. What is most serious in the eyes of God, is not that this hasty judgment is often false and always unjust, but that it proceeds from malevolence, though often expressed with the mask of benevolence,

which is only a grimace of charity. Anyone judging rashly is not only a judge who arrogates to himself jurisdiction over the souls of his brothers which he does not possess, but a judge sold by his egoism and his pride, at times a pitiless judge, who knows only how to condemn, and who, though unaware of it, presumes to impose laws on the Holy Ghost, admitting no other way than his own. Instead of seeing in his neighbor a brother, a son of God, called to the same beatitude as he is, he sees in him only a stranger, perhaps a rival to supplant and humiliate. This defect withdraws many from the contemplation of divine things; it is a veil over the eyes of the spirit.

If we do not go so far, we may judge the interior life of a soul rashly in order to enjoy our own clear vision and to show it off. Let us remember that God alone sees this conscience openly. We should be on our guard and remember with what insistence Christ said: "Judge not." At the moment when we are judging rashly, we do not foresee that shortly afterward we shall perhaps fall into a more grievous sin than the one for which we reproached our neighbor. We see the mote in our neighbor's eye and do not see the beam in our own.

If the evil is evident, does God demand that we should not see it? No, but He forbids us to murmur with pride. At times, He commands us in the name of charity to practice fraternal correction with benevolence, humility, meekness, and discretion, as indicated in the Gospel of St. Matthew,¹⁶⁶⁸ and as St. Thomas¹⁶⁶⁹ explains it. We should see whether correction is possible and if there is hope for amendment, or whether it is necessary to have recourse to the superior that he may warn the guilty person.¹⁶⁷⁰

Finally, as St. Catherine of Siena says, when the evil is evident, perfection, instead of murmuring, has compassion on the guilty party; we take on ourselves, in part at least, his sin before God, following the example of our Lord who took all our sins upon Himself on the cross. Did He not say to us: "Love one another, as I have loved you"?¹⁶⁷¹

We must, therefore, repress rash judgment that we may become accustomed to see our neighbor in the light of faith and to discover in him the life of grace, or at least his nature so far as it is an image of God that grace should ennoble.

It is not sufficient to look upon our neighbor benevolently; we must love him effectively. We can do this by bearing with his defects, returning him good for evil, avoiding jealousy, and praying for union of hearts.

We bear with another's defects more easily if we observe that often what arouses our impatience is not a serious sin in the eyes of God, but rather a defect of temperament: nervousness or, on the contrary, apathy, a certain narrowness of judgment, a frequent lack of tact, a certain way of putting himself forward, and other defects of this kind. Even if the defect is grave, we should not allow ourselves to go so far as to become irritated over evil that is permitted by God; and we should not allow our zeal to become bitterness. While complaining of others, let us not go so far as to persuade ourselves that we have realized the ideal. Without suspecting it, we would be uttering the prayer of the Pharisee.

To put up with the defects of another, we must remember that God permits evil only for a higher good. It has been said that God's business consists in drawing good from evil, whereas we can do good only with good. The scandal of evil, producing a bitter and indiscreet zeal, is responsible for the fruitlessness of many reforms. The truth should be told with measure and goodness and not spoken with contempt. We should also avoid indiscretion that leads to speaking without sufficient reason about the faults of one's neighbor, which is slander and may lead to calumny.

The Gospel tells us that not only must we bear with the defects of our neighbor, but also return good for evil by prayer, edification, and mutual assistance. It is related that one of the ways of winning the good graces of St. Teresa was to cause her pain. She really practiced the counsel of Christ: "If a man will contend with thee in judgment and take away thy coat, let go thy cloak also unto him."¹⁶⁷² Why should we do this? Because it is much less important to defend our temporal rights than to win the soul of our brother for eternity, than to lead him to the true life which has no end. In particular, prayer for our neighbor, when we have to suffer from him, is especially efficacious, as was that of Jesus for His executioners and that of St. Stephen, the first martyr, when he was being stoned.

We must also avoid jealousy, telling ourselves that we ought to enjoy in a holy manner the natural and supernatural qualities that the Lord has given to others and not to us. As St. Paul says: "If the foot should say: Because I am not the hand, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body? And if the ear should say: Because I am not the eye, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body? If the whole body were the eye, where would be the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where would be the smelling? But now God hath set the members, everyone of them, in the body as it hath pleased Him. And if they all were one member, where would be the body? But now there are many members indeed, yet one body. And the eye cannot say to the hand: I need not thy help; nor again the head to the feet: I have no need of you.... But God hath tempered the body together... that there might be no schism in the body; but the members might be mutually careful one for another. And if one member suffer anything, all the members suffer with it; or if one member glory, all the members rejoice with it. Now you are the body of Christ, and members of member."¹⁶⁷³ The hand benefits by what the eye sees; similarly we benefit by the merits of others. We should therefore rejoice in the good qualities of another instead of allowing ourselves to become jealous. We must exercise charity particularly toward inferiors who are weaker, and toward superiors who have greater burdens to bear. We must not emphasize their defects; were we in their place, we would perhaps do less well than they. But we must help them as much as possible in a

discreet and, so to speak, unperceived manner.

Lastly, we must pray for union of minds and hearts. Praying for His disciples, Christ said: “The glory which Thou hast given Me, I have given to them; that they may be one, as We also are one.”¹⁶⁷⁴ In the primitive Church, the Acts tell us: “The multitude of believers had but one heart and one soul; neither did anyone say that aught of the things which he possessed was his own; but all things were common unto them.”¹⁶⁷⁵ As it spread over the world, the Church could not preserve such great intimacy among its members, but religious communities and Christian fraternities should remember the union of hearts in the early Church. In communities where there is common observance of life and prayers, this interior union must exist, otherwise observances and common prayer would be a lie to God, to men, and to ourselves. Union of hearts contributes to giving the Church the luster of the mark of sanctity, which presupposes unity of faith, worship, hierarchy, hope, and charity.

The radiating charity that unites the different members of the Savior’s mystical body, in spite of diversity of ages, countries, temperaments, and characters, is a sign that the Word became flesh, that He came among us to unite us and to give us life. He Himself declares it in His sacerdotal prayer: “The glory which Thou hast given Me, I have given to them; that they may be one, as We also are one..., and the world may know that Thou hast sent Me, and hast loved them, as Thou hast also loved Me.”¹⁶⁷⁶

Zeal for the Glory of God and the Salvation of Souls

“I am come to cast fire on the earth: and what will, I, but that it be kindled?”

Luke 12:49

To show what charity should normally be in the illuminative way of proficients, we shall discuss the zeal which every Christian, especially the priest and religious, should have for the glory of God and the salvation of souls. If this zeal is lacking, or does not exist in the degree that it should manifestly have, it is an additional and at times striking sign of what our love of God and souls should normally be, of what the living, profound, radiating knowledge of the things of God should also be in us. Those whose duty it is spiritually to feed others, themselves need a substantial daily food, that to be had every day in intimate participation in the Sacrifice of the Mass, in Communion, and in prayer.

We have seen that love of neighbor is the extension or the radiation of the love we should have for God: this love should extend to the children of God. It is one and the same supernatural theological love; it is essentially divine, like grace, a participation in the inner life of God. This love should become so ardent in a fervent Christian soul as to merit the name of zeal. Especially for a soul consecrated to God, it is a duty to have zeal for His glory and the salvation of one's neighbor. Basically it is one and the same zeal, the ardor of one and the same love, which should subsist, though not always sensible, in the midst of aridities and trials of all sorts, just as in the heart of a good soldier ardent love of country subsists in the most trying hours when he can only be patient and endure. Zeal is the ardor of love, but of a spiritual love of the will, which is at times proportionately more generous and meritorious as it is less felt.¹⁶⁷⁷

We may with profit consider the motives of zeal, what its qualities should be, and the means to exercise it.

THE MOTIVES OF ZEAL

For every Christian the first motive of zeal is that God deserves to be loved above all things. This motive is not the object of a counsel, but of the supreme precept, which has no limits; it makes it our duty to grow continually in charity while on earth, to love the Lord with our whole heart, with our whole soul, with all our strength, and with all our mind.¹⁶⁷⁸ Even in the Old Testament the supreme precept was already formulated in the same terms.¹⁶⁷⁹ We know what zeal in corresponding to it was shown by the prophets, whose mission it was ceaselessly to remind the people of God of their great duties. The Psalmist says to the Lord: “The zeal of Thy house hath eaten me up: and the reproaches of them that reproach Thee are fallen upon me.”¹⁶⁸⁰ “My zeal hath made me pine away: because my enemies forgot Thy words.... I am very young and despised; but I forget not Thy justifications.”¹⁶⁸¹ Elias, reaching Mount Horeb and being questioned by God about what he had done, replies: “With zeal have I been zealous for the Lord God of hosts: for the children of Israel have forsaken Thy covenant: they have thrown down Thy altars, they have slain Thy prophets with the sword, and I alone am left, and they seek my life to take it away.”¹⁶⁸² It was then that the Lord told Elias that He was going to pass before him, and, after a violent wind and an earthquake accompanied by lightning, there was “the whistling of a gentle air,” the symbol of the divine gentleness; then the Lord gave the prophet His orders, and revealed to him that Eliseus was called to succeed him.

Likewise we read in the first book of the Machabees that the priest Mathathias, exhorting his sons to begin the holy war, said: “Phinees our father, by being fervent in the zeal of God, received the covenant of an everlasting priesthood.... Elias, while he was full of zeal for the law, was taken up into heaven.... Daniel in his innocence was delivered out of the mouth of the lions.... You therefore, my sons, take courage, and behave manfully in the law; for by it you shall be glorious.”¹⁶⁸³

This zeal led Jesus to cast the buyers and sellers out of the temple and to overthrow their tables, saying to them: “It is written: ‘My house shall be called the house of prayer; but you have made it a den of thieves.’”¹⁶⁸⁴ Especially after Pentecost, the apostles had this zeal; it led them all even to martyrdom. It still exists in the Church wherever the testimony of blood is given and in numerous lives consecrated to the service of God even to immolation. The first motive of zeal is, therefore, that God deserves to be loved above all and without measure.

The second motive of zeal is that we should imitate our Lord Jesus Christ. The predominant virtue of the Savior is zeal, the ardor of charity, as He Himself says: “I am come to cast fire [of charity] on the earth: and what will I, but that it be kindled?”¹⁶⁸⁵ St. Paul writes: “Wherefore when He cometh into the world, He saith: ‘Sacrifice and oblation [of the Old Law] Thou wouldest not: but a body Thou hast fitted to Me.... Then said I: Behold I come... that I should do Thy will, O God.’”¹⁶⁸⁶ All during His life, our Lord offered Himself; at twelve years of age He announced that He came to be about His Father's

business.¹⁶⁸⁷ He offered Himself continually during His hidden life, showing us in what humility and abnegation truly divine works should be prepared. From the beginning of His public life, He saw the indifference of the Jews of Nazareth, who called Him the son of the carpenter, and He experienced the hatred of the Pharisees, which would increase even to the point of demanding His death on the cross. The Word of God came among His own to save them, and many of His own were not willing to receive Him; they did not wish to let themselves be saved. Opposition came from those who should least have opposed Him, from the priests of the Old Law, the prelude of the New.¹⁶⁸⁸ The suffering which this attitude caused the Savior was profound like His love of souls: it was the suffering of ardent and overflowing charity, which wishes to give itself and often meets only with indifference, inertia, lack of comprehension, ill will, and spiteful opposition.

This thirst for the glory of God and the salvation of souls was the great cause of the sorrow which the Savior experienced at the sight of the sins of men. It was also the cause of Mary's suffering at the foot of the cross.

All His life long Christ felt this desire for the salvation of souls and continually carried this cross of desire; He aspired strongly to realize His redemptive mission by dying for us on the cross. For this reason He said at the last supper the night before He died: "With desire I have desired to eat this pasch with you, before I suffer";¹⁶⁸⁹ and then instituting the Eucharist, He said: "This is My body, which is given for you.... This is the chalice, the new testament in My blood, which shall be shed for you."¹⁶⁹⁰ Christ desired with a great desire the accomplishment of His mission by the perfect sacrifice of Himself, by the most complete gift of self.

The suffering that accompanied this ardent desire ceased with His death on the cross, but this desire, this thirst for our salvation, still endures; He is "always living to make intercession for us,"¹⁶⁹¹ especially in the Sacrifice of the Mass, which continues sacramentally that of Calvary. In the Eucharist our Lord continues to make His appeals heard and to give Himself to souls, even to repentant prisoners and criminals sentenced to death."

This hunger and thirst for the salvation of sinners which is still living in the holy soul of Christ led St. Catherine of Siena to write to one of her spiritual sons: "I should like to see you suffer so greatly from hunger for the salvation of souls that you could die of it like Christ Jesus, that at least because of it you would die to the world and to yourself." Such thoughts are to be found on every page of this great saint's letters.

A third motive for our zeal is precisely the value of the immortal souls redeemed by the blood of Christ. Each of them is worth more than the entire physical universe, and each is called to receive the benefits of the redemption and eternal life. We should remember the zeal of the apostles who "went from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were accounted worthy to suffer reproach for the name of Jesus,"¹⁶⁹² and who could say to the faithful, as St. Paul did: "I most gladly will spend and be spent myself for your souls; although loving you more, I be loved less."¹⁶⁹³ Zeal prompted St. Paul to write: "We are buffeted, and have no fixed abode.... We are reviled, and we bless; we are persecuted, and we suffer it; we are blasphemed, and we entreat."¹⁶⁹⁴ Zeal led the apostles even to martyrdom, and for three centuries after them the same was true of many bishops, priests, and laymen of every rank and age. The martyrs, whose heroism gave rise to numerous conversions, had such eminent zeal for the glory of God and the salvation of souls that it became an undeniable proof of the sanctity of the Church. If when a man's country is in danger he loves it to the extent that he will sacrifice himself for it, with what greater reason should we love the Church which leads us to the eternal country, where all the just of all peoples should meet.

Lastly, a fourth motive of our zeal is the contrary zeal with which the enemies of the Church toil at works of disorder, corruption, and death. What should draw us out of our somnolence, is the impious, spiteful, satanic war waged against our Lord and our holy Mother the Church; a war surpassing all others, a war of the spirit, which is carried on in the innermost depths of hearts, even in the souls of little children, whom they desire to snatch from our Lord that they may make them reprobates and atheists. This war is indescribably perverse like the sins of the spirit; it is loaded down with crushing responsibilities. The Church sees the formidable consequences of this struggle on those who are intent upon it; it continues to pray for them, that God may cure their blindness and halt them on the road of damnation, into which they are dragging so many others with them.

The principal motives of zeal are consequently: the glory of God, the imitation of our Lord, the salvation of souls, and the relief of the souls in purgatory.

THE QUALITIES OF ZEAL

Zeal, according to its definition, should be ardent since it is the ardor of love; but here is meant enduring spiritual ardor, and not a sudden impetus, sensible enthusiasm of temperament, natural activity eager to take outward form through personal satisfaction and the seeking after self which wearies others. That it may not lose any of its spiritual ardor and may preserve it for a long time, zeal should be free from all excessively human self-seeking; to be so, it must be enlightened, patient, meek, and disinterested.

Zeal should, first of all, be illumined by the light of faith, by that of obedience and Christian prudence, and also by the gifts of wisdom and counsel. The light of natural reason does not suffice, for it is a question of performing not only a human work,

but a divine work, of laboring at the salvation and sanctification of souls with the means indicated by our Lord. Zeal animated only by the natural spirit, instead of converting souls to God, gradually allows itself to be converted by the world, to be seduced by high-sounding phrases devoid of meaning. It dreams, for example, of a future city and loses sight of the supernatural end of the true city of God which St. Augustine speaks of. This zeal, which is that of restless, blundering, ambitious people, is impulsive, unseasonable, and inopportune; it forgets the indispensable, supernatural means, prayer and penance, recalled by Mary Immaculate at Lourdes.

Especially in difficult circumstances, zeal should beg the Holy Ghost for the light of the gift of counsel, not that it should propose to do extraordinary things, but to accomplish as perfectly as possible the ordinary duties fixed by the wisdom of the Church and obedience: to say Mass well or to unite oneself intimately to it, to be faithful to prayer under its different forms, and to one's duties of state. Sometimes heroic obedience may be demanded; should it be lacking, the greatest qualities of mind and heart would not suffice to compensate for its absence. Some servants of God, who were manifestly called to sanctity, seem not to have reached it because they lacked this heroic virtue.

Zeal should be not only enlightened, but also patient and meek. While preserving its ardor, and indeed in order to preserve it, zeal should avoid becoming uselessly irritated against evil, pouring itself out in vain indignation and sermonizing indiscriminately. The Gospel shows us that in the service of the Lord the Boanerges, or sons of thunder,¹⁶⁹⁵ as James and John were, become meek. Zeal should know how to tolerate certain evils in order to avoid greater ones and not itself turn to bitterness. What is only less good should not be cast aside as evil; the smoking flax should not be extinguished nor the broken reed crushed. We should always remember that Providence permits evil in view of a superior good, which we often do not yet see, but which will shine forth on the last day under the light of eternity.

To be patient and meek, zeal should be disinterested, and that in two ways: by avoiding appropriating to self what belongs only to God and what pertains to others. Some people are zealous for the works of God, but, motivated by unconscious self-seeking, they consider these works too much as their own. As Tauler says, they resemble hunting dogs that are eager in running down the hare, but that eat it after catching it, instead of bringing it back to their master; thereupon he whips them soundly. Thus these people keep for themselves the souls which they should win for our Lord, and as a result God punishes them severely to teach them to efface themselves, that He may act in them and through them. When they are less sure of themselves, less persuaded of their importance, and somewhat broken or at least more supple, the Lord will use them as docile instruments. They will then completely forget themselves in the hands of the Savior, who alone knows what is necessary to regenerate souls.

Let us not appropriate what belongs to others. Often we wish to do good, but we desire too greatly that we should do it in our way. We should not wish to do everything, or hinder others from working and being more successful than we are. Let us not be jealous of their success. Above all, we ought not to take upon ourselves the direction of souls that have not been entrusted to us; we ought to be on our guard not to take them away from a salutary influence, for the Lord might require a severe accounting from us in this matter. It is for Him we are working and not for ourselves. This is what He wished to make His apostles understand one day when they had been disputing among themselves about which was the greatest. He then asked them: "What did you treat of in the way?" But they did not dare to reply, and it was then that, "calling unto Him a little child, [He] set him in the midst of them, and said: Amen I say to you, unless you be converted, and become as little children, you shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven."¹⁶⁹⁶ He wished to make them understand that their zeal should be humble and disinterested.

He wished to convince particularly the sons of Zebedee, James and John, of this when their mother came to Him and asked for them the first two places in the kingdom of heaven. Jesus said to them: "You know not what you ask. Can you drink the chalice that I shall drink? They say to Him: We can. He saith to them: My chalice indeed you shall drink; but to sit on My right or left hand, is not Mine to give to you, but to them for whom it is prepared by My Father.... And he that will be first among you, shall be your servant. Even as the Son of man is not come to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give His life a redemption for many."¹⁶⁹⁷ Thus our Lord taught the sons of Zebedee to dominate their natural ardor by humility and meekness, in order to transform it into a pure and fruitful supernatural zeal. Similarly He cures us sometimes by rebuffs and trials administered to our self-love and pride. He corrects us thus until we no longer wish to do our work; then, after permitting the lower part of our nature to be broken by events, and when selfishness has been overcome, He makes use of us for His work, the salvation of souls. Then zeal, though it preserves its spiritual ardor, is calm, humble, and meek, like that of Mary and the saints, and nothing can any longer crush it: "If God be for us, who can be against us?"

This zeal for the glory of God and the salvation of souls should be exercised by the apostolate under various forms: the apostolate by the teaching of Christian doctrine and the spiritual and corporal works of mercy; the apostolate by prayer, which draws down divine grace to render fruitful the labor of those who toil in the Lord's vineyard. When profound, this hidden apostolate is the soul of the exterior apostolate. Lastly, there should also be the apostolate by reparatory suffering; hidden, too, like that of prayer, it continues, as it were, in the mystical body of Christ the sufferings of Jesus during the Passion and on the cross for the regeneration of souls. When, in the mystical body of Christ, a member voluntarily suffers through love, another

infirm member is healed, as in our human body painful remedies relieve infected organs, which then gradually resume their functions. When the servants of God immolate their bodies and hearts, the Lord spares the body of an unfortunate person whose strength is spent, or cures a sick heart which had not the courage to break its chains. When in the mystical body a generous soul sacrifices its own will, in another the Lord revives a dead will and grants it the grace of conversion.

Such are the qualities of zeal, which is the ardor of charity, an enlightened, patient, meek, disinterested, and truly fruitful ardor that glorifies God, imitates our Lord, snatches souls from evil, and saves them.

It is clear that this zeal should exist, that too often it is lacking, and that it is in the normal way of sanctity. But to subsist, it should be kept up by profound prayer, by prayer that is continual and like an almost uninterrupted conversation of the soul with God in perfect docility. We shall now discuss this docility and this prayer of proficients; it is this prayer that gave its name to the illuminative way in which the soul is more and more penetrated by the light of God.

THE SOURCES OF SPIRITUAL PROGRESS AND DIVINE INTIMACY

What we have just said about the progress of the moral and theological virtues leads us to speak of the sources of spiritual progress and divine intimacy. We shall do so by treating of what docility to the Holy Ghost, the discerning of spirits, the Sacrifice of the Mass, Holy Communion, devotion to Mary, should be for proficients. We shall finish Part III by examining the questions relative to the passage from acquired prayer to initial infused prayer, to the nature of infused contemplation, and to its progress.

Docility to the Holy Ghost

Having spoken of the progress of the theological virtues in the illuminative way, we shall now treat of docility to the Holy Ghost who, through His seven gifts, is the Inspirer of our entire life with a view to contemplation and action.

Earlier in this work¹⁶⁹⁸ we set forth the nature of the gifts of the Holy Ghost, according to the teaching of St. Thomas,¹⁶⁹⁹ who considers them permanent infused habits, which are in every just soul that it may receive the inspirations of the Holy Ghost with promptness and docility. According to the fathers of the Church, the gifts are in the just soul like the sails on a vessel; the boat may advance by rowing, which is a slow and painful way of making progress; this is the symbol of the work of the virtues. It may also advance because a favorable wind swells its sails, which dispose it to receive, as it should, the impulsion of the wind. This analogy was indicated in a way by Christ Himself when He said: “The Spirit breatheth where He will; and thou hearest His voice, but thou knowest not whence He cometh and whither He goeth. So is everyone that is born of the Spirit.”¹⁷⁰⁰

The gifts of the Holy Ghost have also been compared to the different strings of a harp which, under the hand of a musician, give forth harmonious sounds. Lastly, the inspirations of the gifts have been likened to the seven flames of the seven-branch candelabrum used in the synagogue.

These gifts, enumerated by Isaias and called by him “the spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the spirit of counsel and of fortitude, the spirit of knowledge and of godliness, and... the spirit of the fear of the Lord,”¹⁷⁰¹ are granted to all the just, since the Holy Spirit is given to all according to these words of St. Paul: “The charity of God is poured forth in our hearts by the Holy Ghost, who is given to us.”¹⁷⁰² The gifts of the Holy Ghost are consequently connected with charity,¹⁷⁰³ and therefore they grow with it. They are like the wings of a bird that grow simultaneously, or like the sails of a ship that increasingly unfurl. By repeated venial sins, however, the gifts of the Holy Ghost are, as it were, bound; these habitual venial sins are like folds in the soul, which incline it to judge in an inferior manner with a certain blindness of spirit, which is the direct opposite of infused contemplation.¹⁷⁰⁴ We shall discuss first the inspirations of the Holy Ghost, then the ascending gradation of the gifts, and finally the conditions required for docility to the Holy Ghost.

THE INSPIRATIONS OF THE HOLY GHOST

The special inspiration to which the gifts render us docile is, as we have explained,¹⁷⁰⁵ quite different from common actual grace which leads us to the exercise of the virtues. Under common actual grace, we deliberate in a discursive or reasoned manner, for example, to go to Mass, or to say the Rosary at the accustomed hour. In this case we move ourselves by a more or less explicit deliberation to this act of the virtue of religion. Under a special inspiration of the Holy Ghost, on the contrary, we are moved, for example, in the course of study, to pray in order to obtain light. Here there is no discursive deliberation, the act of the gift of piety is not deliberate; but under the special inspiration it remains free, and the spirit of piety disposes us precisely to receive this inspiration with docility and therefore freely and with merit. St. Thomas distinguishes clearly between common actual grace and special inspiration when he shows the difference between cooperating grace, under which we are moved to act in virtue of an anterior act, and operating grace, by which we are moved to act by consenting freely to receive the impulsion of the Holy Ghost.¹⁷⁰⁶ In the first case, we are more active than passive; in the second, we are more passive than active, for it is more the Holy Ghost who acts in us.¹⁷⁰⁷

It happens, moreover, that under this special inspiration the gifts are exercised at the same time that the work of the virtues is done. Thus while the boat advances by rowing, there may be a slight breeze which facilitates the labor of the rower. Likewise the inspirations of the gifts may recall to our mind many principles from the Gospel at the time when our reason deliberates on a decision to be made. Inversely, our prudence sometimes recognizes its powerlessness to find the solution of a difficult case of conscience, and it then moves us to ask for the light of the Holy Ghost, whose special inspiration makes us see and accomplish what is fitting. We should be increasingly docile to Him.

THE ASCENDING GRADATION OF THE GIFTS

These inspirations of the Holy Ghost are exceedingly varied, as is shown by the enumeration of the gifts in the eleventh chapter of Isaias, and their subordination starting with that of fear, the least elevated, up to that of wisdom, which directs all the others from above¹⁷⁰⁸ This gradation given by Isaias and explained by St. Augustine, St. Thomas, and later St. Francis de Sales, is

like an ancient hymn replete with beautiful modulations, one of the leitmotifs of traditional theology. In this gradation we perceive a spiritual scale analogous to that of the seven principal notes of music.

The gift of fear is the first manifestation of the influence of the Holy Ghost in a soul that leaves off sin and is converted to God. It supplies for the imperfection of the virtues of temperance and of chastity; it helps us to struggle against the fascination of forbidden pleasures and against the impulses of the heart.¹⁷⁰⁹

This holy fear of God is the inverse of worldly fear, often called human respect. It is superior also to servile fear which; although it has a salutary effect on the sinner, has not the dignity of a gift of the Holy Ghost. Servile fear is that which trembles at the punishments of God; it diminishes with charity, which makes us consider God rather as a loving Father than as a judge to be feared.

Filial fear, or the gift of fear, dreads sin especially, more than the punishments due it. It makes us tremble with a holy respect before the majesty of God. At times the soul experiences this holy fear of offending God; occasionally the experience is so vivid that no meditation, no reading, could produce a like sentiment. It is the Holy Ghost who touches the soul. This holy fear of sin is “the beginning of wisdom,”¹⁷¹⁰ for it leads us to obey the divine law in everything, which is wisdom itself. Filial fear increases with charity, like the horror of sin; in heaven, though the saints no longer have the fear of offending God, they still have the reverential fear which makes the angels themselves tremble before the infinite majesty of God, “tremunt potestates,” in the words of the preface of the Mass. This fear was even in the soul of Christ and still remains there.¹⁷¹¹

This fear of sin, which inspired the great mortifications of the saints, corresponds to the beatitude of the poor: blessed are they who through fear of the Lord detach their hearts from the pleasures of the world, from honors; in their poverty they are supernaturally rich, for the kingdom of heaven is theirs.

Fear has a negative element, making us flee from sin; but the soul needs a more filial attitude toward God. The gift of piety inspires us precisely with a wholly filial affection for our Father in heaven, for Christ our Savior, for our Mother, the Blessed Virgin, for our holy protectors.¹⁷¹² This gift supplies for the imperfection of the virtue of religion, which renders to God the worship due Him, in the discursive manner of human reason illumined by faith. There is no spiritual impulse and no lasting fervor without the gift of piety, which hinders us from becoming attached to sensible consolations in prayer and makes us draw profit from dryness, aridities, which are intended to render us more disinterested and spiritual. St. Paul writes to the Romans: “You have received the spirit of adoption of sons, whereby we cry: Abba (Father)... ‘. Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmity. For we know not what we should pray for as we ought; but the Spirit Himself asketh for us with unspeakable groanings.”¹⁷¹³ By this gift we find a supernatural sweetness even in our interior sufferings; it is particularly manifest in the prayer of quiet, in which the will is captivated by the attraction of God, although the intellect often has to struggle against distractions. By its sweetness this gift makes us resemble Christ, who was meek and humble of heart. Its fruit, according to St. Augustine, is the beatitude of the meek, who shall possess the land of heaven. St. Bernard and St. Francis de Sales excelled in the gift of piety.

But to have a solid piety that avoids illusion and dominates the imagination and sentimentalism, the Holy Ghost must give us the higher gift of knowledge.

The gift of knowledge renders us docile to inspirations superior to human knowledge and even to reasoned theology. We are here concerned with a supernatural feeling that makes us judge rightly of human things, either as symbols of divine things, or in their opposition to the latter.¹⁷¹⁴ It shows us vividly the vanity of all passing things, of honors, titles, the praises of men; it makes us see especially the infinite gravity of mortal sin as an offense against God and a disease of the soul. It throws light particularly on what in the world does not come from God, but from defectible and deficient second causes; in this it differs from the gift of wisdom. By showing the infinite gravity of mortal sin, it produces not only fear but horror of sin and a great sorrow for having offended God.

It gives the true knowledge of good and evil, and not that which the devil promised to Adam and Eve when he said to them: “In what day soever you shall eat thereof, your eyes shall be opened: and you shall be as Gods, knowing good and evil.” As a matter of fact, they had the bitter knowledge or experience of evil committed, of proud disobedience, and of its results. The Holy Ghost, on the other hand, promises the true knowledge of good and evil; if we follow Him, we shall be in a sense like God, who knows evil to detest it and good to realize it.

Only too often human knowledge produces presumption; the gift of knowledge, on the contrary, strengthens hope because it shows us that every human help is fragile as a reed; it makes us see the nothingness of earthly goods and leads us to desire heaven, putting all our confidence in God. As St. Augustine says, it corresponds to the beatitude of the tears of contrition. Blessed are they who know the emptiness of human things, especially the gravity of sin; blessed are they who weep for their sins, who have true compunction of heart, of which *The Imitation* often speaks. By this gift we find the happy mean between a discouraging pessimism and an optimism made up of levity and vanity. Precious knowledge of the saints possessed by all great apostles: St. Dominic, for example, often wept on seeing the state of certain souls to which he brought the word of God.

Above the gift of knowledge, according to the enumeration of Isaias, comes the gift of fortitude. Why does the prophet place

fortitude above knowledge? Because to be able to discern good and evil is not sufficient; we need strength to avoid the one and practice the other perseveringly without ever becoming discouraged. We must undertake a war against the flesh, the spirit of the world, and the spirit of evil, which is at times exceedingly afflictive. We have powerful, subtle, perfidious enemies. Shall we let ourselves be intimidated by certain worldly smiles, by a thoughtless speech? If we yield on this point, we shall fall into the snares of him who wishes our damnation and who struggles so much the more desperately against us as our vocation is higher.¹⁷¹⁵

The gift of fortitude strengthens our courage in danger, and comes to the help of our patience in long trials. It is this gift that sustained the martyrs, that gave invincible constancy to children, to Christian virgins, like Agnes and Cecilia, to St. Joan of Arc in her prison and on her pyre. It corresponds, says St. Augustine, to the beatitude of those who hunger and thirst after justice in spite of all contradictions, of those who preserve a holy enthusiasm that is not only sensible, but spiritual and supernatural, even in the midst of persecution. It gave the martyrs of the early Church a holy joy in their torments.¹⁷¹⁶

But in difficult circumstances, in which the lofty acts of the gift of fortitude are exercised, we must avoid the danger of temerity which distinguishes fanatics. To avoid this danger, we need a higher gift, that of counsel.

The gift of counsel supplies for the imperfection of the virtue of prudence, when prudence hesitates and does not know what decision to make in certain difficulties, in the presence of certain adversaries. Must we still preserve patience, show meekness, or, on the contrary, give evidence of firmness? And, in dealing with clever people, how can we harmonize “the simplicity of the dove and the prudence of the serpent”?¹⁷¹⁷

In these difficulties, we must have recourse to the Holy Ghost who dwells in us. He will certainly not turn us away from seeking counsel from our superiors, our confessor, or director; on the contrary, He will move us to do so, and then He will fortify us against rash impulsiveness and pusillanimity. He will make us understand also what a superior and a director would be incapable of telling us, especially the harmonizing of seemingly contradictory virtues: prudence and simplicity, fortitude and meekness, frankness and reserve. The Holy Ghost makes us understand that we should not say something that is more or less contrary to charity; if, in spite of His warning, we do so, not infrequently it produces disorder, irritation, great loss of time, to the detriment of the peace of souls. All of this might easily have been avoided. The enemy of souls, on the contrary, exerts himself to sow cockle, to cause confusion, to transform a grain of sand into a mountain; he makes use of petty, almost imperceptible trifles, but he achieves results with them as a person does who puts a tiny obstacle in the movement of a watch in order to stop it.

Sometimes it is these trifles that arrest progress on the way of perfection; the soul is held captive by inferior things as by a thread which it has not the courage to break: for example, by a certain habit contrary to recollection or humility, to the respect due to other souls, which are also the temples of the Holy Ghost. All these obstacles are removed by the inspirations of the gift of counsel, which corresponds to the beatitude of the merciful. These last are, in fact, good counselors who forget themselves that they may encourage the afflicted and sinners.

As the gift of counsel is given to us to direct our conduct by supplying for the imperfection of prudence, which would often remain hesitant, we need a superior gift to supply for the imperfection of faith. This virtue attains the mysteries of the inner life of God only by the intermediary of abstract and multiple formulas which we should like to be able to sum up in a single one that would express more exactly what the living God is for us.

Here the gift of understanding comes to our assistance by a certain interior light that makes us penetrate the mysteries of salvation and anticipate all their grandeur.¹⁷¹⁸ Without this light, it happens often that we hear sermons, read spiritual books, and yet remain in ignorance of the deep meaning of these mysteries of life. They remain like sacred formulas preserved in the memory, but their truth does not touch our soul; it is pale and lusterless, like a star lost in the depths of the heavens. And because we are not sufficiently nourished with these divine truths, we are more or less seduced by the maxims of the world.

On the contrary, a simple soul prostrate before God, will understand the mysteries of the Incarnation, the redemption, the Eucharist, not to explain them, to discuss them, but to live by them. It is the Holy Ghost who gives this penetrating and experimental knowledge of the truths of faith which enables the soul to glimpse the sublime beauty of Christ’s sermons. It is He also who gives souls the profound understanding of their vocation and preserves them in this regard from every failure in judgment.

The gift of understanding cannot exist in a high degree without great purity of heart, of intention; it corresponds, according to St. Augustine, to the beatitude: “Blessed are the clean of heart: for they shall see God.”: Even here on earth they begin to glimpse Him in the words of Scripture, which at times are illumined for them as if underscored by a line of light. St. Catherine of Siena and St. John of the Cross excel in this understanding of the mysteries of salvation that they may make us comprehend the plenitude of life contained in them.

The gift of wisdom is finally, according to the enumeration of Isaias, the highest of all, as charity, to which it corresponds, is the loftiest of the virtues. Wisdom appears eminently in St. John, St. Paul, St. Augustine, St. Thomas. It leads them to judge all things by relation to God, the first Cause and last End, and to judge them thus, not as acquired theology does, but by that

connaturalness or sympathy with divine things which comes from charity. By His inspiration, the Holy Ghost makes use of this connaturalness to show us the beauty, the sanctity, and the radiating plenitude of the mysteries of salvation, which correspond so well to our deepest and highest aspirations.¹⁷¹⁹ Opposed to wisdom is spiritual folly, *stultitia*, of which St. Paul often speaks.¹⁷²⁰

From this higher point of view, it becomes evident that a number of learned men are mad in their vain learning, when, for example, in discussing the origins of Christianity, they wish to deny the supernatural at any cost; they fall into manifest absurdities. In a less inferior degree, believers who are instructed in their religion but whose judgment is faulty take scandal at the mystery of the cross which continues in the life of the Church.¹⁷²¹ They do not have a sufficiently clear perception of the value of supernatural means, of prayer, the sacraments, trials borne with love; they are too much preoccupied with human culture and occasionally confound liberalism and charity, as others confound narrowness and firmness in faith. This is a lack of wisdom.¹⁷²²

The gift of wisdom, the principle of a living contemplation that directs action, enables the soul to taste the goodness of God, to see it manifested in all events, even in the most painful, since God permits evil only for a higher good, which we shall see later and which it is sometimes given us to glimpse on earth. The gift of wisdom thus makes us judge everything in relation to God; it shows the subordination of causes and ends or, as they say today, the scale of values. It reminds us that all that glitters is not gold and that, on the contrary, marvels of grace are to be found under the humblest exteriors, as in the person of St. Benedict Joseph Labre or Blessed Anna Maria Taigi. This gift enables the saints to embrace the plan of Providence with a gaze entirely penetrated with love; darkness does not disconcert them for they discover in it the hidden God. As the bee knows how to find honey in flowers, the gift of wisdom draws lessons of divine goodness from everything.

Wisdom reminds us, as Cardinal Newman says, that: “A thousand difficulties do not make a doubt” so long as they do not impair the very basis of certitude. Thus many difficulties which subsist in the interpretation of several books of the Old Testament or of the Apocalypse do not make a doubt as to the divine origin of the religion of Israel or of Christianity.

The gift of wisdom thus gives the supernaturalized soul great peace, that is the tranquillity of the order of things considered from God’s point of view. Thereby this gift, says St. Augustine, corresponds to the beatitude of the peacemakers, that is to say, of those who remain in peace when many are troubled and who are capable of bringing peace to the discouraged. This is one of the signs of the unitive life.

How is it possible that so many persons, after living forty or fifty years in the state of grace, receiving Holy Communion frequently, give almost no indication of the gifts of the Holy Ghost in their conduct and actions, take offense at a trifle, show great eagerness for praise, and live a very natural life? This condition springs from venial sins which they often commit without any concern for them; these sins and the inclinations arising from them lead these souls toward the earth and hold the gifts of the Holy Ghost as it were bound, like wings that cannot spread. These souls lack recollection; they are not attentive to the inspirations of the Holy Ghost, which pass unperceived. Consequently they remain in obscurity, not in the darkness from above, which is that of the inner life of God, but in the lower obscurity which comes from matter, from inordinate passions, sin, and error; this is the explanation of their spiritual inertia. To these souls are addressed the words of the Psalmist, which the Divine Office places before us daily at Matins: “Today if you shall hear His voice, harden not your hearts.”¹⁷²³

CONDITIONS REQUIRED FOR DOCILITY TO THE HOLY GHOST

To be docile to the Holy Ghost, we must first hear His voice. To do so, recollection, detachment from the world and from self are necessary, as are the custody of the heart, the mortification of self-will, and personal judgment. If silence does not reign in our soul, if the voice of excessively human affections troubles it, we cannot of a certainty hear the inspirations of the interior Master. For this reason the Lord subjects our sensible appetites to severe trials and in a way crucifies them that they may eventually become silent or fully submissive to our will animated by charity. If we are ordinarily preoccupied with ourselves, we shall certainly hear ourselves or perhaps a more perfidious, more dangerous voice which seeks to lead us astray. Consequently our Lord invites us to die to ourselves like the grain of wheat placed in the ground.

To hear the divine inspirations, we must, therefore, create silence in ourselves; but even then the voice of the Holy Ghost remains mysterious. As Christ says: “The Spirit breatheth where He will; and thou hearest His voice, but thou knowest not whence He cometh and whither He goeth. So is everyone that is born of the Spirit.”¹⁷²⁴ Mysterious words, which should make us prudent and reserved in our judgments about our neighbor, attentive to the attractions placed in us by the Lord, which are the mixed seed of a future known to divine Providence. They are attractions toward renunciation, toward interior prayer; they are more precious than we think. Some intellectuals from an early age have an attraction to silent mental prayer, which alone perhaps will preserve them from spiritual pride, from dryness of heart, and will make their souls childlike, such as they must be to enter the kingdom of God, and especially the intimacy of the kingdom. A vocation to a definite religious order may often be recognized by these early attractions.

The voice of the Holy Ghost begins, therefore, by an instinct, an obscure illumination, and if one perseveres in humility and conformity to the will of God, this instinct manifests its divine origin clearly to the conscience while remaining mysterious. The first gleams will become so many lights which, like the stars, will illumine the night of our pilgrimage toward eternity; the dark night will thus become luminous and like the aurora of the life of heaven, “and night shall be my light in my pleasures.”¹⁷²⁵

To succeed in being docile to the Holy Ghost, we need, therefore, interior silence, habitual recollection, attention, and fidelity.

ACTS WHICH PREPARE THE SOUL FOR DOCILITY TO THE HOLY GHOST

We dispose ourselves to docility to the Holy Ghost by three principal acts: (1) By obeying faithfully the will of God which we already know through the precepts and the counsels proper to our vocation. Let us make good use of the knowledge that we have; God will give us additional knowledge.(2) By frequently renewing our resolution to follow the will of God in everything. This good resolution thus renewed draws down new graces on us. We should often repeat Christ’s words: “My meat is to do the will of Him that sent Me.”¹⁷²⁶ (3) By asking unceasingly for the light and strength of the Holy Ghost to accomplish the will of God. We may with profit consecrate ourselves to the Holy Ghost, when we feel the attraction to do so, to place our soul more under His dominion and as it were, in His hand. We may make this consecration in the following terms: “O Holy Ghost, divine Spirit of light and love, I consecrate to Thee my mind, my heart, my will, and my whole being for time and eternity. May my mind be ever docile to Thy celestial inspirations and to the teaching of the holy Catholic Church of which Thou art the infallible Guide. May my heart be always inflamed with love of God and of my neighbor. May my will be ever conformed to the divine will, and may my whole life be a faithful imitation of the life and virtues of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, to whom, with the Father and Thee, O Holy Ghost, be honor and glory forever.”¹⁷²⁷

St. Catherine of Siena used to pray: “O Holy Ghost, come into my heart; by Thy power, O God, draw me to Thyself and grant me charity with filial fear. Keep me, O ineffable Love, from every evil thought; warm and kindle me with Thy sweetest love, and every suffering will seem light to me. My Father, my sweet Lord, help me in all my actions. O Jesus love, O Jesus love!”

This consecration is also admirably expressed in the beautiful sequence:

Veni, Sancte Spiritus,
Et emitte coelitus
Lucis tuae radium.

When such a consecration is made with a great spirit of faith, its effect may be most profound. Since a fully deliberate pact with the devil brings in its wake so many disastrous effects in the order of evil, an act of consecration to the Holy Ghost can produce greater ones in the order of good, for God has more goodness and power than the devil has malice.

Consequently the Christian who has consecrated himself to Mary Mediatrix, for example, according to the formula of St. Grignon de Montfort, and then to the Sacred Heart, will find treasures in the often renewed consecration to the Holy Ghost. All Mary’s influence leads us to the intimacy of Christ, and the humanity of the Savior leads us to the Holy Ghost, who introduces us into the mystery of the adorable Trinity. We may fittingly make this consecration at Pentecost and renew it frequently.

Especially when difficulties arise, when most important actions are being changed, we must ask for the light of the Holy Ghost, sincerely wishing only to do His will. This done, if He does not give us new lights, we shall continue to do what will seem best to us. Therefore, at the opening assemblies of the clergy and of religious chapters, the assistance of the Holy Ghost is invoked by votive Masses in His honor.

Lastly we should note exactly the different movements of our soul in order to discover what comes from God and what does not. Spiritual writers generally say that God’s action in a soul submissive to grace is ordinarily characterized by peace and tranquillity; the devil’s action is violent and accompanied by disturbance and anxiety.

THE HARMONIZING OF DOCILITY TO THE HOLY GHOST WITH OBEDIENCE AND PRUDENCE

The first Protestants wished to regulate everything by private inspiration, subjecting to it even the Church and its decisions. For the true believer, however, docility to the interior Master admits nothing contrary to the faith proposed by the Church and to its authority; on the contrary, it tends only to perfect faith and the other virtues.

Likewise the inspiration of the Holy Ghost, far from destroying the obedience due to superiors, aids and facilitates its practice. Inspiration should be understood with the implied condition that obedience enjoins nothing contrary to it.

In the words of Father Lallemand, S.J.: “The only thing to be feared is that superiors may sometimes follow human prudence excessively, and that for want of discernment they may condemn the lights and inspirations of the Holy Ghost, treating them as illusions and reveries, and prescribe for those to whom God communicates Himself by such favors as if they were invalids. In

this case, a person should still obey, but God will one day correct the error of these rash spirits and teach them to their cost not to condemn His graces without understanding them and without being qualified to pass judgment on them.”¹⁷²⁸

Neither should it be said that docility to the Holy Ghost renders useless the deliberations of prudence or the counsel of experienced people. The interior Master tells us, on the contrary, to be attentive to what we can see for ourselves; He also invites us to consult enlightened persons, but adds that we should at the same time have recourse to Him. As St. Augustine says: “God orders us to do what we can, and to ask for the grace to accomplish what we cannot do by ourselves.” The Holy Ghost sent even St. Paul to Ananias to learn from him what he was to do. This docility then harmonizes perfectly with obedience, prudence, and humility; it even greatly perfects these virtues.

THE FRUITS OF DOCILITY TO THE HOLY GHOST

All our perfection most certainly depends on this fidelity. According to Father Lallemant: “Some have many beautiful practices and perform a number of exterior acts of virtue; they give themselves wholly to the material action of virtue. Such a way of living is good for beginners; but it belongs to a far greater perfection to follow one’s interior attraction and to regulate one’s conduct by its movement.”¹⁷²⁹ Were we to apply ourselves to purifying our heart, to eliminating what is opposed to grace, we would arrive twice as soon at perfection. We read in the same chapter:

The end to which we should aspire, after we have for a long time exercised ourselves in purity of heart, is to be so possessed and governed by the Holy Ghost that He alone will direct all our powers and senses, regulate all our interior and exterior movements, and that we may surrender ourselves entirely by a spiritual renunciation of our will and our own satisfaction. Thus we will no longer live in ourselves, but in Jesus Christ, by a faithful correspondence with the operations of His divine Spirit and by a perfect subjection of all our rebellious movements to the power of grace.

Few persons attain the graces that God destined for them, or, having once lost them, succeed later in repairing their loss. The majority lack the courage to conquer themselves and the fidelity to use the gift of God with discretion.

When we enter on the path of virtue, we walk at first in darkness, but if we faithfully and constantly followed grace, we would infallibly reach great light both for ourselves and for others....

Sometimes, after receiving a good inspiration from God, we immediately find ourselves attacked by repugnances, doubts, perplexities, and difficulties which spring from our corrupted nature and from our passions, which are opposed to the divine inspiration. If we received it with full submission of heart, it would fill us with the peace and consolation which the Holy Ghost brings with Him....

It is of faith that the least inspiration of God is more precious and more excellent than the whole world, since it belongs to a supernatural order and cost the blood and the life of a God.

What stupidity! We are insensible to the inspirations of God because they are spiritual and infinitely elevated above the senses. We do not pay much attention to them, we prefer natural talents, brilliant positions, the esteem of men, our little comforts and satisfactions. Prodigious illusion from which, nevertheless, a number are undeceived only at the hour of death!

Then in practice we take away from the Holy Ghost the direction of our soul and, though its center is made for God alone, we fill it with creatures to His prejudice; and instead of dilating and enlarging it infinitely by the presence of God, we contract it exceedingly by occupying it with some wretched little nothings. That is what hinders us from attaining perfection.¹⁷³⁰

On the contrary, says the same author, docility to the Holy Ghost would show us that He is truly the Consoler of our souls in the uncertainty of our salvation, in the midst of the temptations and tribulations of this life, which is an exile.

We need this consolation because of the uncertainty of our salvation in the midst of the snares which surround us, of all that can make us deviate from the right road. Strictly speaking, we cannot merit final perseverance, for it is nothing else than the state of grace at the very moment of death, and grace, being the principle of merit, cannot be merited.¹⁷³¹ Therefore we need the direction, protection, and consolation of the Holy Ghost, who “giveth testimony to our spirit that we are the sons of God.”¹⁷³² He gives us this testimony, by the filial affection for God which He Inspires In us. He is thus the pledge of our inheritance.”¹⁷³³

We also need the Holy Ghost to console us in the temptations of the devil and the afflictions of this life. The unction which He pours into our souls sweetens our sorrows, strengthens our wavering wills, and makes us at times find a true, supernatural savor in crosses.

Lastly, as Father Lallemant says so well: “The Holy Ghost consoles us in our exile on earth, far from God. This exile causes an inconceivable torment in holy souls, for these poor souls experience in themselves a sort of infinite void, which we have in ourselves and all creation cannot fill, which can be filled only by the enjoyment of God. While they are separated from Him, they languish and suffer a long martyrdom that would be unbearable to them without the consolations which the Holy Ghost gives them from time to time.... A single drop of the interior sweetness that the Holy Ghost pours into the soul, ravishes it out of itself and causes a holy inebriation.”¹⁷³⁴ Such is indeed the profound meaning of the name given to the Holy Ghost: Paraclete or Comforter.

On the subject of the ascending gradation of the seven gifts of the Holy Ghost, which we discussed in this chapter, we should note the following important statement made by St. John of the Cross. It throws great light on the unitive way, which we shall

discuss farther on. Treating of the transforming union, the mystical doctor wrote in *A Spiritual Cantic of the Soul*: “The cellar is the highest degree of love to which the soul may attain in this life, and is therefore said to be the inner. It follows from this that there are other cellars not so interior; that is, the degrees of love by which souls reach this, the last. These cellars are seven in number, and the soul has entered into them all when it has in perfection the seven gifts of the Holy Ghost, so far as it is possible for it.... The last and inmost cellar is entered by few in this world, because therein is wrought the perfect union with God, the union of the spiritual marriage.”^{[1735](#)}

These lines of St. John of the Cross express as clearly as possible the doctrine which we set forth in the course of this entire work on the full development of the life of grace.

The Discerning of Spirits

Docility to the Holy Ghost, which we spoke of in the preceding chapter, requires, as we said, interior silence, habitual recollection, and the spirit of detachment in order to hear His inspirations, which at first are similar to a secret instinct that increasingly manifests its divine origin if we are faithful to it. This docility also requires that the inspirations of the Holy Ghost be discerned from those which might lead us astray, from those of two other spirits or inspirations, which may at first appear good, but which lead to death. The discerning of spirits is, consequently, a subject we should consider.

By the discerning of spirits may be understood one of the *gratiae gratis datae*, mentioned by St. Paul,¹⁷³⁶ by which the saints occasionally discern at once whether, for example, a person is speaking or acting through the spirit of true charity or only simulating this virtue. But by the discerning of spirits may also be meant a wise discretion proceeding from infused prudence with the cooperation of acquired prudence and the higher help of the gift of counsel and of the graces of state granted to the spiritual director who is faithful to his duties. It is with this second meaning that we shall discuss the discerning of spirits.

This question was treated by St. Anthony the hermit, patriarch of monks,¹⁷³⁷ by St. Bernard in his thirty-third Sermon; by Cardinal Bona,¹⁷³⁸ by St. Ignatius,¹⁷³⁹ by Scaramelli,¹⁷⁴⁰ and many other writers who draw their inspiration from those who preceded them.

By spirit is meant the tendency to judge, will, or act in one way or another; thus we speak of the spirit of contradiction, dispute, and so on. But in spirituality especially, we distinguish three spirits: the spirit of God; the purely natural spirit, proceeding from our fallen nature, which also has its impulses, fortitude, lyricism, its momentary enthusiasms, which may create illusion; lastly, the spirit of the devil to whose interest it is to hide himself and disguise himself as an angel of light. For this reason St. John says in his First Epistle: "Dearly beloved, believe not every spirit; but try the spirits if they be of God; because many false prophets are gone out into the world."¹⁷⁴¹

Generally one of three spirits is dominant in every soul: in the perverse, the devil; in the tepid, the natural spirit; in those who are beginning to give themselves seriously to the interior life, the Spirit of God habitually dominates, but there are many interferences of the natural spirit and of the spirit of evil. Consequently no one should ever be judged by one or two isolated acts, but by his whole life. Even in the perfect, God permits certain imperfections, at times more apparent than real, to keep them in humility and to give them frequent opportunity to practice the contrary virtues. There are persons advanced in the ways of God, who are, as the result of an illness (for example, a progressive infection of the blood), inclined to exceptional irritability. They are like people badly dressed, because their illness increases, as it were tenfold, the painful impression produced by contradictions, and sometimes the latter are incessant. There may be great merit in this struggle, and great patience in seeming impatience.

It is, therefore, most important to discern clearly what spirit moves us, what is God's action in us and what is our own, according to the words of St. John in the prologue of his Gospel: "But as many as received Him, He gave them power to be made the sons of God, to them that believe in His name, who are born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God."¹⁷⁴² To be "born of God," is our great title of nobility, and we may say of it more than of any other: *Noblesse oblige*.

The great principle of the discerning of spirits was given to us by our Lord Himself in the Gospel when He said: "Beware of false prophets, who come to you in the clothing of sheep, but inwardly they are ravening wolves. By their fruits you shall know them. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit, and the evil tree bringeth forth evil fruit. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can an evil tree bring forth good fruit."¹⁷⁴³

Those, in fact, who are animated by an evil intention cannot long hide it. It does not delay, says St. Thomas,¹⁷⁴⁴ in manifesting itself in different ways: first of all, in things that must be accomplished instantly without time to deliberate and to conceal its intent; then in tribulations, as we read in Ecclesiasticus: "There is a friend for his own occasion, and he will not abide in the day of thy trouble."¹⁷⁴⁵ Likewise, men show their character when they cannot obtain what they wish or when they have already obtained it; thus when a man attains power, he shows what he is.

The tree is known by its fruit: that is, if our fundamental will is good, it yields good fruit. If we hear the word of God that we may put it into practice, people are not long in seeing it; if, on the contrary, we hear it and content ourselves with saying, "Lord, Lord," without doing the will of God, how can we expect good fruit? In the light of this principle, "The tree is judged by its fruit," we can judge what spirit moves us. We must see the results of its influence and compare them with what the Gospel tells us about the principal Christian virtues: humility and mortification or abnegation on the one hand, and, on the

other, the three theological virtues of faith, hope, love of God and of souls in God.

THE SIGNS OF THE SPIRIT OF NATURE

In consequence of original sin, nature is the enemy of mortification and humiliations; it seeks self while increasingly disregarding in practice the value of the three theological virtues. In the life of piety as elsewhere, nature pursues pleasure, and it falls into spiritual gluttony, which is the seeking after self and, therefore, the contrary of the spirit of faith and of love of God.

At the first difficulties or aridities, the spirit of nature stands still, quits the interior life. Often, under the pretext of the apostolate; it takes satisfaction in its natural activity, in which the soul becomes increasingly exterior; it confounds charity with philanthropy. Let contradiction, let trial arise, nature complains of the cross, grows irritated, and becomes discouraged. Its first fervor was only a passing enthusiasm; it is indifferent to the glory of God, to His reign, and to the salvation of souls; it is the negation of the zeal or ardor of charity. The spirit of nature is summed up in one word: egoism.

After seeking and failing to find pleasure in the interior life, it declares that one must prudently avoid all exaggeration in austerity, prayer, all mysticism; and from this point of view, a person is already a mystic who daily reads a chapter of *The Imitation* with recollection. It declares that one must follow the common way, by which it means the common way of tepidity or mediocrity, an unstable mean between good and evil, but closer to evil than to good. It seeks rather frequently to make this mediocrity pass for moderation, for the happy mean of virtue. In reality, the happy medium is also a summit above contrary vices, whereas mediocrity seeks to remain halfway between this summit and the depths, the inconveniences of which it would like to avoid without any true love of virtue.

The spirit of nature is depicted by St. Paul as follows: "The sensual man perceiveth not these things that are of the Spirit of God. For it is foolishness to him, and he cannot understand, because it is spiritually examined."¹⁷⁴⁶ The egoist judges everything from his individual point of view and not from God's. Gradually the spirit of faith, confidence, love of God and souls disappears in him; he relies on himself, weakness itself. At times, however, the gravity of his own ill enlightens him and reminds him of the Savior's words: "Without Me you can do nothing."

THE SIGNS OF THE SPIRIT OF THE DEVIL

The devil first lifts us up by inspiring us with pride, subsequently to cast us down into trouble, discouragement, and even despair. To recognize his influence, we must consider it in relation to mortification, humility, and the three theological virtues.

The devil does not necessarily, as nature does, disincite us to mortification; on the contrary, he urges certain souls toward an exaggerated, very visible, exterior mortification, especially in centers where it is held in honor. Such a course of action keeps pride alive and ruins health. But the devil does not incline a soul to the interior mortification of the imagination, heart, self-will, and personal judgment, although he sometimes simulates it in us by inspiring us with scruples about trifles and great liberality on dangerous or serious matters. He gives us a great opinion of ourselves, leads us to prefer ourselves to others, to boast of ourselves, unwittingly to pray like the Pharisee.

This spiritual pride is often accompanied by a false humility which makes us speak ill of ourselves on certain points in order to hinder others from speaking ill about us on another point, and in order to give the impression that we are humble. Or indeed it makes us confound humility with timidity, which is rather the fear of rebuffs and scorn.

Instead of nourishing faith by the consideration of the teaching of the Gospel, the spirit of evil draws the attention of certain souls to what is most extraordinary and marvelous, of a nature to make us esteemed, or again to what is foreign to our vocation. He inspires a missionary with the thought of becoming a Carthusian, a Carthusian with that of going to evangelize the infidel. Or, on the contrary, he leads others to minimize the supernatural, to modernize faith by the reading, for example, of liberal, Protestant works.

His way of exciting hope is to give rise to presumption, to lead us to wish to be saints immediately without traversing the indispensable stages and the way of abnegation. He even inspires us with a certain impatience with ourselves and with vexation instead of contrition.

Far from causing our charity to grow, he cultivates self-love in us and, according to temperaments and circumstances, makes charity deviate either in the direction of a humanitarian sentimentalism of extreme indulgence, or toward liberalism under the guise of generosity, or, on the contrary, toward a bitter zeal, which chides others indiscriminately instead of correcting itself. He shows us the mote in our neighbor's eye, when there is a beam in our own.

Instead of giving peace, this spirit engenders dissensions, hatreds. People no longer dare to talk to us; we would not put up with contradiction. An encumbering personalism can thus lead a man to see only himself and unconsciously to place himself on a pedestal.

Should we commit a very evident sin, which we cannot conceal, we fall into confusion, vexation, discouragement; and the devil, who veiled the danger from us before the sin, now exaggerates the difficulties of turning back to God and seeks to lead

us to spiritual desolation. He fashions souls to his own image; he rose through pride and he fell in despair.

Great care must therefore be exercised if we have lively sensible devotion and come forth from prayer with increased self-love, preferring ourselves to others, failing in simplicity with our superiors and director. The lack of humility and obedience is a certain indication that it is not God who guides us.

THE SIGNS OF THE SPIRIT OF GOD

The signs of the spirit of God are contrary to those of the spirit of nature and of the devil. The spirit of God inclines us to exterior mortification, in which it differs from the spirit of nature, but to an exterior mortification regulated by discretion and obedience, which will not attract attention to us or ruin our health. Moreover, it makes us understand that exterior mortification is of little value if not accompanied by that of the heart, of self-will, and of personal judgment; in this respect, the spirit of God differs from the spirit of the devil.

The spirit of God inspires true humility, which forbids us to prefer ourselves to others, does not fear scorn, is silent about divine favors received, does not deny them if they exist, but refers all their glory to God. It leads us to nourish our faith with what is most simple and profound in the Gospel, while remaining faithful to tradition and fleeing novelties. It shows us our Lord in superiors, and hereby develops our spirit of faith. It quickens hope and preserves us from presumption. It makes us ardently desire the living waters of prayer, reminding us that we must reach them by degrees and by the way of humility, renunciation, and the cross. It gives a holy indifference in regard to human success.

The spirit of God augments the fervor of charity, gives zeal for the glory of God, forgetfulness of self. It leads us to think first of God and to leave the care of our interests to Him. It stirs up the love of our neighbor in us, showing therein the great sign of the love of God. It hinders us from judging rashly, from taking scandal without motive; it inspires meek and patient zeal which edifies by prayer and example instead of irritating by untimely admonitions. The spirit of God gives patience in trial, love of the cross, and love of enemies. It gives peace with ourselves and with others, and even quite often interior joy. Then, if we should happen to fall, it speaks to us of mercy. According to St. Paul, “The fruit of the Spirit is charity, joy, peace, patience, benignity, goodness, longanimity, mildness, faith, modesty, continency, chastity,”¹⁷⁴⁷ which are united to obedience and humility.

If it is a question of one act in particular, this is a sign that God is visiting our soul when no natural cause has brought the profound consolation with which it suddenly feels itself filled. God alone penetrates thus into the innermost depths of the soul. However, we must distinguish carefully from this first moment of happiness those which follow it, although the soul still feels the grace received, for in the second moment it often happens that of ourselves we form certain thoughts which are no longer inspired by God and into which error may slip.

Rarely does the Holy Ghost make revelations; they are an extraordinary grace that it would be presumptuous to desire, but frequently the interior Guest gives His inspirations to fervent souls make them taste certain words of the Gospel. Then, under the divine inspiration, the faithful soul should go forward like the artist who follows his genius and who, without thinking of the rules of art, observes them in a superior and spontaneous manner. Then are harmonized humility and zeal, fortitude and meekness, the simplicity of the dove and the prudence of the serpent. Thus the Holy Spirit leads faithful souls to the harbor of eternity.¹⁷⁴⁸

The Sacrifice of the Mass and Proficients

When we discussed the purification of the souls of beginners¹⁷⁴⁹, we spoke of assistance at Mass as a source of sanctification. We shall now treat of the Sacrifice of the Mass in the illuminative way of proficients.

The excellence of the Sacrifice of the Mass, as we said¹⁷⁵⁰, comes from the fact that the Mass is in substance the same sacrifice as that of the cross, because it is the same principal Priest who continues really to offer Himself through His ministers, the same Victim really present on the altar who is really offered, only the manner of offering being different: on the cross there was a bloody immolation, whereas in the Mass there is a sacramental immolation through the separation, not physical but sacramental, of the body and blood of the Savior by virtue of the double consecration. This sacramental immolation is the memorial of the bloody immolation that is past and the sign of the interior oblation perpetually living in the heart of Christ, who, as St. Paul says, “is always living to make intercession for us.”¹⁷⁵¹ This interior oblation of Jesus, which was like the soul of the sacrifice of the cross, remains the soul of the Sacrifice of the Mass, which perpetuates in substance that of Calvary.

Deeper penetration daily into what constitutes the infinite value of the sacrifice of the altar is essential to progress in the interior life. Speaking to the Lutherans, who suppressed the Eucharistic sacrifice, St. John Fisher declared that: “The Mass is like the sun which daily illumines and warms all Christian life.”

The Christian and Catholic doctrine of the Sacrifice of the Mass may be penetrated either in an abstract and speculative manner or in a concrete and experimental manner by uniting oneself personally to the Savior’s oblation.

Proficients should live by the four ends of the sacrifice: adoration, reparation, petition, and thanksgiving. Blessed Peter Eymard insisted greatly on this point. That a proficient may live more profoundly by the Mass, he should, in union with our Lord, offer up everything painful in each day and throughout his life, even until his entrance into heaven. It is fitting that he make in advance the sacrifice of his life to obtain the grace of a holy death. Spiritual progress is, in fact, essentially ordered to the last act of love here on earth. If well prepared for by our whole life and very well made, this act will open the gates of heaven to us immediately.

To enter the depths of the Mass, we must place ourselves in the school of the Mother of God. More than anyone else in the world, Mary was associated with the sacrifice of her Son, sharing in all His sufferings in the measure of her love for Him.

Some saints, in particular the stigmatics, for example, St. Francis of Assisi and St. Catherine of Siena, have been exceptionally united to the sufferings and merits of our Savior. But profound as this union was, in comparison with Mary’s it was insignificant. By a most intimate experimental knowledge and by the greatness of her love, Mary at the foot of the cross entered the depths of the mystery of the redemption more than did St. John, St. Peter, or St. Paul. She entered it in the measure of the plenitude of grace which she had received; in the measure of her faith, of her love, of the gifts of understanding and wisdom which she had in a degree proportionate to her charity.

That we may enter a little into this mystery and draw from it practical lessons which will enable us to prepare ourselves for a good death, we should think of the sacrifice we ought to make of our lives in union with Mary at the foot of the cross.

The dying are often exhorted to make the sacrifice of their lives in order to give a satisfactory, meritorious, and impetrating value to their last sufferings. The sovereign pontiffs, in particular Pius X, have invited the faithful to offer in advance these sufferings of the last moment, which may perhaps be very great, that they may be well disposed to offer them more generously in their last hour.

But that we may even now make this sacrifice of our lives rightly, we should make it in union with the sacrifice of the Savior sacramentally perpetuated on the altar during Mass, in union with the sacrifice of Mary, Mediatrix and Coredemptrix. And to see clearly all that this oblation implies, it is expedient to recall here the four ends of the sacrifice: adoration, reparation, petition, and thanksgiving. We shall consider them successively and draw from them the lessons that they hold for us.

ADORATION

Jesus on the cross made His death a sacrifice of adoration. It was the most perfect accomplishment of the precept of the Decalogue: “Thou shalt fear the Lord thy God, and shalt serve Him only.”¹⁷⁵² Jesus used these divine words when He replied to Satan, who, after showing Him all the kingdoms of the world, said to Him: “All these will I give Thee, if falling down Thou wilt adore me.”¹⁷⁵³

Adoration is due to God alone because of His sovereign excellence as Creator, because He alone is eternally subsistent Being, Wisdom, and Love. The adoration due Him should be both exterior and interior and should be inspired by love; it should be adoration in spirit and in truth.

Adoration of infinite value was offered to God by Christ in Gethsemane when He prostrated Himself, saying: “My Father, if it be possible, let this chalice pass from Me. Nevertheless, not as I will, but as Thou wilt.”¹⁷⁵⁴ Christ’s adoration of the Father recognized in a practical and profound manner the sovereign excellence of God, Master of life and death, of God who, through the love of the Savior, willed to make death, the penalty of sin, serve as reparation for sin and for our salvation. In this eternal decree of God, which contains the entire history of the world, there is a sovereign excellence, recognized by the adoration of Gethsemane.

The Savior’s adoration continued on the cross, and Mary associated herself with it in the measure of the plenitude of grace which she had received and which had not ceased to grow. At the moment of the crucifixion of her Son, she adored the rights of God, the Author of life, who for the eternal good of souls was about to make the death of her innocent Son serve as reparation for sin.

In union with our Lord and His holy Mother, let us adore God and say from our hearts, as Pius X invited us to do: “O Lord, my God, from this moment with a tranquil and submissive heart, I accept from Thy hand the type of death that it shall please Thee to send me, with all its anguish, sufferings, and sorrows.” Whoever recites this act of resignation after confession and Communion once in the course of his life, will gain a plenary indulgence that will be applied to him at the hour of death, according to the purity of his conscience. We would do well, however, to repeat this act of oblation daily, and by so doing prepare ourselves to make our death, in union with the sacrifice of Christ continued in substance on the altar, a sacrifice of adoration. And while we are making this act, we should consider the sovereign dominion of God, the majesty and goodness of Him who “ledest down to hell, and bringest up again.”¹⁷⁵⁵ “For it is Thou, O Lord, that hast power of life and death, and ledest down to the gates of death, and bringest back again.”¹⁷⁵⁶ This adoration of God, Master of life and death, may be made in quite different ways, according as souls are more or less enlightened. Is there a better way than thus to unite oneself daily to the Savior’s sacrifice of adoration?

Let us from now on be adorers in spirit and in truth. May our adoration be so sincere and so profound that it will be reflected on our life and dispose us for that which we should have in our hearts at the moment of our death.

REPARATION

A second end of the Sacrifice of the Mass is reparation of the offense offered to God by sin and satisfaction for the punishment due to sin. Since adoration should, properly speaking, be reparatory, we ought to make our death a propitiatory sacrifice.

Christ satisfied superabundantly for our sins because, says St. Thomas,¹⁷⁵⁷ in offering His life for us, He made an act of love which pleased God more than all the sins of the human race displeased Him. His charity was far greater than the malice of His executioners; His charity had an infinite value which it drew from the personality of the Word.

He satisfied for us, the members of His mystical body. But as the first cause does not render the secondary causes superfluous, the Savior’s sacrifice does not render ours useless, but arouses it and gives it its value. Mary set us the example by uniting herself to the sufferings of her Son; she thus satisfied for us to the point of meriting the title of coredemptrix. She accepted the martyrdom of her Son, whom she not only cherished but legitimately adored, and whom she loved most tenderly from the moment she conceived Him virginally.

Even more heroic than the patriarch Abraham ready to immolate his son Isaac, Mary offered her Son for our salvation, and saw Him die in the most atrocious physical and moral sufferings. An angel did not come and put a stop to the sacrifice and say to Mary, as to the patriarch, in the name of the Lord: “Now I know that thou fearest God, and hast not spared thy only-begotten son for My sake.”¹⁷⁵⁸ Mary saw the effective and full realization of Jesus’ sacrifice of reparation, of which that of Isaac was only a figure. She suffered then from sin in the measure of her love for God whom sin offends, for her Son whom sin crucified, for our souls which sin ravages and puts to death. The charity of the Blessed Virgin incomparably surpassed that of the patriarch, and in her more than in him, were realized the words which he heard: “Because thou hast done this thing, and hast not spared thy only-begotten son for My sake, I will bless thee, and I will multiply thy seed as the stars of heaven.”¹⁷⁵⁹

Since the sacrifice of Jesus and Mary was a sacrifice of propitiation or reparation for sin, of satisfaction for the punishment due to sin, let us, in union with them, make the sacrifice of our lives a reparation for all our sins. Let us from now on ask that our last moments may have both a meritorious and an expiatory value, and let us also ask for the grace to make this sacrifice with great love, which will increase its twofold value. We should be happy to pay this debt to divine justice that order may be fully re-established in us. If, in this spirit, we unite ourselves intimately to the Masses that are being celebrated every day, if we unite ourselves to the oblation always living in the heart of Christ, an oblation which is the soul of these Masses, then we shall obtain the grace to unite ourselves to them in the same way at the hour of our death. If this union of love with Christ Jesus

is daily more intimate, the satisfaction of purgatory will be notably shortened for us. We may even receive the grace to complete our purgatory on earth while meriting, while growing in love, instead of after death without meriting.

PETITION

The daily sacrifice, like that of the hour of death, should be not only a sacrifice of adoration and reparation, but also a sacrifice of petition in union with Jesus and Mary.

St. Paul writes to the Hebrews: “[Christ] offering up prayers and supplications... was heard for His reverence.... And being consummated, He became, to all that obey Him, the cause of eternal salvation.”¹⁷⁶⁰ Let us call to mind Christ’s sacerdotal prayer after the Last Supper and shortly before the sacrifice of the cross: in it Jesus prayed for His apostles and for us. And let us be mindful of the fact that He is “always living to make intercession for us,”¹⁷⁶¹ in particular in the Sacrifice of the Mass, of which He is the principal Priest.

Jesus, who prayed for His executioners, prays for the dying who recommend themselves to Him. With Him the Blessed Virgin Mary intercedes, remembering that we have often said to her: “Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our death.”

The dying man should unite himself to the Masses being celebrated far and near; he should ask through them, through the great prayer of Christ which continues in them, for the grace of a good death or final perseverance, the grace of graces, that of the elect. He should ask this grace not only for himself, but for all those who are dying at the same time.

To dispose ourselves even now to make this act of petition in our last hour, we should often pray at Mass for those who will die in the course of the day. Following the recommendation of Pope Benedict XV, we should occasionally have a Mass offered to obtain through this infinitely valuable sacrifice of petition the grace of a good death, or the application of our Savior’s merits. We should also have Masses offered for those of our relatives and friends about whose salvation we have reason to be concerned, in order to obtain for them the final grace, and also for those whom we may have scandalized and perhaps led astray from the way of God.

THANKSGIVING

Lastly, everyone should daily prepare himself to make his death, in union with our Lord and Mary, a sacrifice of thanksgiving for all the benefits received since baptism, keeping in mind the many absolutions and Communions that have reinstated or kept him in the way of salvation.

Christ made His death a sacrifice of thanksgiving when He said: “It is consummated”;¹⁷⁶² Mary uttered this “*Consummatum est*” with Him. This form of prayer, which continues in the Mass, will not cease even when the last Mass has been said at the end of the world. When there will no longer be any sacrifice properly so called, there will be its consummation, and in it there will always be the adoration and thanksgiving of the elect who, united to our Savior and to Mary, will sing the Sanctus with the angels and glorify God while thanking Him.

This thanksgiving is admirably expressed by the words of the ritual which the priest says at the bedside of the dying after giving them a last absolution and Holy Viaticum. “Go forth from this world, Christian soul, in the name of God the Father almighty, who created thee, in the name of Jesus Christ, the Son of the living God, who suffered for thee, in the name of the glorious and holy Mother of God, the Blessed Virgin Mary, in the name of Blessed Joseph, her predestined spouse, in the name of the angels and archangels, in the name of the patriarchs, prophets, apostles, martyrs, in the name of all the saints of God. May thy dwelling today be in peace and thy rest in the heavenly Jerusalem, through Jesus Christ, our Lord.”

To conclude, we should often repeat, in order to give it its full value, the act recommended by Pope Pius X, and we should ask Mary for the grace to make our death a sacrifice of adoration, reparation, petition, and thanksgiving. When we assist the dying, we should exhort them to make this sacrifice while uniting themselves to the Masses then being celebrated. We ourselves should even now make it in advance and often renew it each day as if it were to be our last. By so doing we prepare ourselves to make it very well at the last moment. Then we shall understand that if God leads the soul down to the gates of death, He brings it back again.¹⁷⁶³ Our death will be as if transfigured; we shall call on the Savior and His holy Mother that they may come and get us and grant us the last of graces which will definitively assure our salvation, by a last act of faith, trust, and love.¹⁷⁶⁴

What we have just said of the sacrifice of our lives in union with the Sacrifice of the Mass, should be understood by an interior soul in a realistic and practical manner that will make him live the words of St. Paul: “I die daily.”¹⁷⁶⁵ It is a question here of accepting in advance with patience and love not only the sufferings of the last moments of life, but all the physical and moral sufferings which God has prepared from all eternity to purify us and make us work for the salvation of souls. These sufferings are of all sorts: want of consideration, contradictions, defamation. They are insignificant in comparison with those which Jesus bore for love of us; nevertheless, because of our weakness, they seem very heavy to us at times. Let us accept them

at Mass, before Holy Communion, at the moment of the breaking of the host, which symbolizes the breaking of all the bruises that Jesus bore for us.

May this breaking make us think of what should be in us: fervent contrition. Then, more conscious of our sins and of the necessity of making reparation, for them, we shall more willingly accept in advance the physical and moral sufferings which Providence reserves for us. We shall accept them, asking for a serious beginning of the love of the cross or the love of Jesus crucified. Should we not return Him love for love?

We should reread what Christ says to His faithful servant according to *The Imitation*: “Son, let not the labors which thou hast undertaken for My sake crush thee, neither let tribulations, from whatever source, cast thee down; but in every occurrence let My promise strengthen and console thee. I am sufficient to recompense thee beyond all bounds and measure.... Mind what thou art about: labor faithfully in My vineyard: I will be thy reward; write, read, sing, lament, keep silence, pray, bear adversities manfully: eternal life is worth all these, and greater combats. Peace shall come one day, which is known to the Lord.... Oh! if thou couldst see the everlasting crowns of the saints in heaven, and in how great glory they now triumph, who appeared contemptible heretofore to this world, and as it were even unworthy of life, doubtless thou wouldst immediately cast thyself down to the very earth, and wouldst rather be ambitious to be in subjection to all, than to have precedence over so much as one. Neither wouldst thou covet the pleasant days of this life, but wouldst rather be glad to suffer tribulation for God’s sake, and esteem it the greatest gain to be reputed as nothing amongst men.”¹⁷⁶⁶

In assisting at the Sacrifice of the Mass or in celebrating it, we should unite our personal oblation to our Savior’s, offering Him the contradictions and tribulations which await us in life, mindful that they may thus become most fruitful for us. Obstacles may in this way be transformed into means. The cross was the greatest obstacle that men raised against Jesus; He made it the greatest instrument of salvation. If each member in the mystical body performs his duty supernaturally, all the others benefit, just as, when each little cell in our body functions as it should, the entire organism profits. For this reason, however little we may be able to do, its worth is great if it is accomplished in the spirit of the love of God and of neighbor, in union with Jesus the eternal Priest. In the greatest calamities little children are asked to pray; their earnest, humble prayer, united to that of the Savior, cannot fail to be heard by God.

We may better comprehend what the Mass should be for proficients by reflecting that its different parts correspond to the love which purifies (Confiteor, Introit, Kyrie, Gloria), to the love which enlightens and offers itself (Collect, Epistle, Gospel, Credo, Offertory), and to the love which sacrifices itself and unites itself to God (Consecration, Communion, Thanksgiving). Such consideration reminds us of the purgative way of beginners, the illuminative way of proficients, and the unitive way of the perfect. These are the normal phases of the ascent of the soul toward God.

The Communion of Proficients

Earlier in this work¹⁷⁶⁷ we discussed the Communion of those who begin to give themselves seriously to the interior life. We explained how Holy Communion sustains, restores, and increases spiritual life, and why it demands as a condition an upright and pious intention. A fervent Communion, we said, presupposes hunger for the Eucharist or the keen desire to receive it in order to be more closely united to our Lord and to grow in love of God and neighbor. Each of our Communions, we pointed out, should be substantially more fervent than the preceding one, with a fervor of will if not of feeling; each should, in fact, increase charity in us and consequently prepare us to receive our Lord better and more fruitfully the following day. This is the case in the lives of the saints, whose ascent toward God is increasingly rapid; the nearer they approach Him, the more they are drawn by Him, as the stone falls more rapidly as it approaches the earth which attracts it.¹⁷⁶⁸ This acceleration in the journey toward God should, therefore, be realized in the Communion of proficients far more than in that of beginners. For the child, his first Communion is certainly a great grace, but the following Communions should always be more fruitful.

That we may see what the Communion of proficients should be, we should remember that the principal effect of Holy Communion is the increase of charity. Proficients should grow in this virtue particularly, remembering that fraternal charity is one of the great signs of the progress of the love of God.¹⁷⁶⁹ This will be more readily understood by reflecting that Communion, through union with our Lord, assures the unity and growth of His mystical body.¹⁷⁷⁰

THE HOLY TABLE AND THE UNITY OF THE MYSTICAL BODY

St. Paul writes: “The chalice of benediction which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? And the bread which we break, is it not the partaking of the body of the Lord? For we, being many, are one bread, one body: all that partake of one bread.”¹⁷⁷¹ At this common table of the faithful, every dissension should disappear.

As St. John Chrysostom¹⁷⁷² and St. Augustine¹⁷⁷³ explain, the Communion of the faithful united at the Holy Table to nourish their souls with the body of our Lord and to be increasingly incorporated in Him, is the sign of the unity of the Church and the bond of charity. All the faithful who communicate show, in fact, that they have the same faith in the Eucharist, which supposes all the other mysteries of Christianity; they show that they have the same hope of heaven and the same love of God and of souls in God, the same worship. This it is which makes St. Augustine say: “O sacrament of true piety, sign of unity, bond of charity!... The Lord has given us His body and blood under the species of bread and wine, and as the bread is made out of many grains of wheat and the wine from many grapes, so the Church of Christ is made out of the multitude of the faithful united by charity.”¹⁷⁷⁴

Moreover, Pope Pius X, when inviting the faithful to frequent and daily Communion, recalled this great principle: “The Holy Table is the symbol, the root, and the principle of Catholic unity.” In the light of this principle, we should, before receiving Communion, think of the obstacles that we ourselves may oppose to the supernatural union of charity with Christ Jesus and His members, and should ask Him for light to see these obstacles more clearly and generosity to remove them. If we are negligent in doing so ourselves, we should ask the Lord Himself to remove them, even though we suffer greatly thereby. The Christian who communicates with these profoundly sincere dispositions certainly receives a notable increase of charity, which unites him more closely to our Lord and to souls in Him.

In this sense the author of *The Imitation* invites us to say as a preparation for Holy Communion: “I offer to Thee all my good works, though very few and imperfect, that Thou mayest amend and sanctify them; that Thou mayest have a pleasurable regard to them, and make them acceptable to Thee and always make them tend to better.... I offer to Thee also all the pious desires of devout persons; the necessities of my parents, friends, brothers, sisters, and all those that are dear to me... and who have desired and besought me to offer up prayers and Masses for themselves and all theirs.... I offer up also to Thee prayers and this sacrifice of propitiation for them in particular who have in any way injured me, grieved me, or abused me, or have inflicted upon me any hurt or injury. And for all those likewise whom I have at any time grieved, troubled, oppressed, or scandalized by words or deeds, knowingly or unknowingly; that it may please Thee to forgive us all our sins and mutual offenses. Take, O Lord, from our hearts all suspicion, indignation, anger, and contention, and whatever else may wound charity and lessen brotherly love.”¹⁷⁷⁵

Communion received with these dispositions effectively assures in a concrete and experiential manner the unity of the mystical body, union with our Savior and with all souls vivified by Him. It is thus a powerful help in the midst of so many causes of dissensions among individuals, classes, and peoples. It should contribute greatly to assure the reign of Christ through

the peace of Christ, above all the inconsistent dreams of those who seek a principle of union, not in God but in the passions that divide men.

COMMUNION AND THE GROWTH OF THE MYSTICAL BODY OF CHRIST

Holy Communion should contribute to assure not only the unity, but the growth of the mystical body of our Savior. St. Paul wrote to the Ephesians that we are all called by God to attain “unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the age of the fullness of Christ; that henceforth we be no more children tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine.... But doing the truth in charity, we may in all things grow up in Him who is the head, even Christ; from whom the whole body, being compacted and fitly joined together,... maketh increase of the body, unto the edifying of itself in charity.”¹⁷⁷⁶ This influence of the Savior on His members is exercised particularly by Eucharistic Communion. Christians who are nourished by the bread of life reach the perfection which God destines for them.

St. Thomas even says: “Baptism is the beginning of the spiritual life, and the door of the sacraments; whereas the Eucharist is, as it were, the consummation of the spiritual life, and the end of all the sacraments,... for by the hallowings of all the sacraments preparation is made for receiving or consecrating the Eucharist.... Therefore, from the act of children being baptized, they are destined by the Church to the Eucharist,”¹⁷⁷⁷ somewhat as, in the natural order, childhood is ordered to the full development of adult age. In this sense, at least the implicit desire of the effect of the Eucharist is necessary for salvation.¹⁷⁷⁸ Therefore it is impossible to reach the perfection of Christian life without preparing oneself to receive each Communion with increased fervor of will and greater fruit.

In addition, not only each Christian, but each parish, each diocese, the entire Church in each generation, reaches maturity, the fruitfulness of “the perfect age,” that it may propagate the faith which it has received and transmit it to the following generation like a sacred seed. Each epoch has its difficulties, and, with the return of the masses to unbelief, the difficulties of our day might before long resemble those which the early Church encountered during the centuries of persecution. The Christian should find his strength in the Eucharist today as in the days of the catacombs. He should hunger for the Eucharist, that is, have an ardent desire to be united to Christ by a profound union of the will, which, by the persevering practice of the virtues, will resist all temptations and enable him to cope with the difficult circumstances in which he lives.

With the author of *The Imitation* we should say: “Lord God, when shall I be wholly united to Thee and absorbed in Thee, and altogether unmindful of myself? Thou in me, and I in Thee; and thus grant us both equally to continue in one. Verily, Thou art my Beloved, the choicest among thousands,¹⁷⁷⁹ in whom my soul is well pleased to dwell all the days of this life. Verily, Thou art my Peacemaker; in whom is sovereign peace and true rest; and out of whom is labor and sorrow and infinite misery. Thou art in truth a hidden God,¹⁷⁸⁰ and Thy counsel is not with the wicked, but Thy conversation is with the humble and the simple. Oh, how sweet, O Lord, is Thy spirit,¹⁷⁸¹ who, to show Thy sweetness toward Thy children, vouchsafest to refresh them with that most delicious bread which cometh down from heaven!”¹⁷⁸²

The Psalmist had already exclaimed: “O how great is the multitude of Thy sweetness, O Lord, which Thou hast hidden for them that fear Thee!”¹⁷⁸³ Since the institution of the Eucharist, how well these words are verified by a fervent Communion! We read in *The Imitation*: “For they truly know their Lord in the breaking of bread, whose heart burneth so mightily within them, from Jesus walking with them. Alas, far from me too often is such affection and devotion, such vehement love and ardor. Be Thou merciful to me, O good Jesus, sweet and gracious, and grant Thy poor mendicant to feel, sometimes at least, in Holy Communion some little of the cordial affection of Thy love, that my faith may be more strengthened, my hope in Thy goodness increased; and that my charity, once perfectly enkindled, and having tasted the manna of heaven, may never die away. Powerful, indeed, is Thy mercy to grant me the grace I desire, and in Thy great clemency, when the time of Thy good pleasure arrives, to visit me with the spirit of fervor.”¹⁷⁸⁴

Hunger for the Eucharist is thus expressed by the same author: “With great devotion and ardent love, with all affection and fervor of heart, I desire to receive Thee, O Lord, as many saints and devout persons, who were most pleasing to Thee in holiness of life and in the most burning devotion, have desired Thee when they communicated.... I desire to reserve nothing for myself, but freely and most willingly to immolate to Thee myself and all that is mine.... I desire to receive Thee... with such faith, hope, and purity, as Thy most holy Mother, the glorious Virgin Mary, received and desired Thee, when the angel announced to her the mystery of the Incarnation... ‘. I here offer and present to Thee the joys of all devout hearts, their ardent affections, their ecstasies, supernatural illuminations, and heavenly visions, together with all the virtues and praises that are or shall be celebrated by all creatures in heaven and earth;... thus by all Thou mayest be worthily praised and glorified forever.”¹⁷⁸⁵

The Christian who receives Communion with these dispositions makes increasingly rapid progress toward God and certainly brings other souls with him. Thus is assured the growth of the mystical body of Christ. But we must go a step farther in generosity.

Our Lord commands us: “Love one another, as I have loved you.”¹⁷⁸⁶ He loved us even to dying for us on the cross and giving Himself to us as food in the Eucharist. The Christian should, therefore, in Communion learn the gift of self in order to imitate our Lord. The Eucharistic heart of Jesus, which instituted the Eucharist for us and daily gives it to us, is the eminent exemplar of the perfect gift of self. It reminds us that it is more perfect to give than to receive, to love than to be loved.

Therefore, imitating the example of our Savior, we should, after receiving, give ourselves to others to bring them the light of life and peace. A soul that is increasingly incorporated in our Lord by Holy Communion should in its turn serve somewhat as the bread of the souls which surround it, following the example of our Lord who wished to be our bread. To the less enlightened, to the weak, even to those who wander far from the altar, it should give itself without counting the cost, in spite of misunderstandings, coldnesses, and evil actions. By so doing it will certainly cause souls that have strayed to return to the Eucharistic heart of Jesus, that “forgotten, despised, outraged heart, slighted by men.” It is, nevertheless, the heart which loves us, which is “patient in waiting for us, eager to grant our prayers, desirous that we pray to it, the burning source of new graces, the silent heart wishing to speak to souls, the refuge of the hidden life, master of the secrets of divine union,”¹⁷⁸⁷ the heart of Him who seems to sleep, but who watches always and overflows incessantly with charity.

This heart is the eminent model of the perfect gift of oneself. For this reason a friend of the Cure of Ars, Father Chevrier, a holy priest of Lyons, of whom we spoke earlier in this work, used to say to his spiritual sons: “Following the example of our Lord, the priest should die to his body, spirit, will, reputation, family, the world; he should immolate himself by silence, prayer, work, penance, suffering, and death. The more a man is dead to himself, the more life he has and the more he gives it. The priest is a crucified man. He ought also through charity, in imitation of his Master, to give his body, spirit, time, goods, health, and life; he should give life by his faith, teaching, words, prayers, powers, and example. He must become good bread; the priest is a man who is consumed.”¹⁷⁸⁸

What is said here of the priest, should be said in a certain sense of every perfect Christian, who ought continually to devote himself in a supernatural manner in order to bring those about him to the end of man’s journey, which he too often forgets. Zeal for the glory of God and the salvation of souls is the answer which all should give to our Savior’s precept: “Love one another, as I have loved you.”¹⁷⁸⁹ In fervent Communion we shall find that generosity which causes the gift of God that we have received to radiate on other souls, and which thus shows the value and the fruits of the Eucharist. We have only to receive the love of God and to give it back to Him in the person of our neighbor.

Devotion to Mary in Proficients

In chapter six of the first part of this work, we spoke of the influence of Mary Mediatrix, explaining how she cooperated in the sacrifice of the cross through merit and satisfaction, how she does not cease to intercede for us, to obtain for us and distribute to us all the graces that we receive. We shall apply these principles here, as St. Grignon de Montfort does,¹⁷⁹⁰ to show what devotion to Mary should be in proficients. We shall see what constitutes true devotion to the Blessed Virgin, its degrees, and its fruits.

TRUE DEVOTION TO MARY

We are not speaking here of an entirely exterior, presumptuous, inconstant, hypocritical, and interested devotion, but of true devotion which St. Thomas defines as “promptness of the will in the service of God.”¹⁷⁹¹ This promptness of the will, which should subsist despite aridity of the sensible part of the soul, inclines us to render to our Lord and His holy Mother the worship that is due them.¹⁷⁹² As Jesus is our Mediator with His Father, in the same way we should go to our Savior through Mary. The mediation of the Son throws light on that of His holy Mother.

They are deluded who claim to reach union with God without having continual recourse to our Lord. They will hardly attain to an abstract knowledge of God, and not to that sweet knowledge called wisdom; a lofty knowledge at once practical, living, and experiential, which makes us discover the ways of Providence in the most insignificant things. The quietists were mistaken in holding that Christ’s sacred humanity was a means useful only at the beginning of the spiritual life; they did not sufficiently recognize the universal mediation of our Savior.

Another error consists in wishing to go to our Lord without passing through Mary. This was one of the errors of the Protestants. And even some Catholics do not see clearly enough how expedient it is to have recourse to the Blessed Virgin in order to enter the intimacy of Christ. As St. Grignon de Montfort says, they know Mary “only in a speculative, dry, fruitless, indifferent manner.... They fear that devotion toward her is abused and that injury is done to our Lord by paying excessive honor to His holy Mother.... If they speak of devotion to Mary, it is less to recommend it than to destroy the abuses of it.”¹⁷⁹³ They seem to consider Mary “a hindrance in reaching divine union,”¹⁷⁹⁴ whereas all her influence is exercised in order to lead us to it. It would be just as sensible to say that the holy Cure of Ars was a hindrance to his parishioners in their progress toward God.

To neglect the Mediators whom God has given us because of our weakness, shows a lack of humility. Intimacy with our Lord in prayer will be greatly facilitated by frequent recourse to Mary.

THE DEGREES OF THIS DEVOTION

Devotion to Mary, which should exist in every Christian, ought to grow with charity. The first degree consists in praying to the Blessed Virgin from time to time, honoring her as the Mother of God, saying, for example, the Angelus with true recollection every time it rings. The second degree consists in having more perfect sentiments of veneration, confidence, and love for Mary. They lead us to the daily recitation of at least one of the three parts of the Rosary while we meditate on the joyful, sorrowful, or glorious mysteries, which are for us the road of eternal life.

The third degree of the true devotion to Mary, that proper to proficients, consists in consecrating oneself entirely to our Lord through her. In a clear explanation of this consecration, St. Grignon de Montfort says: “This devotion consists in giving oneself entirely to the Blessed Virgin in order to belong entirely to Jesus Christ through her. We must give her: (1) our body with all its senses and members (that she may keep them in perfect purity); (2) our soul with all its powers; (3) our exterior goods, present and to come; (4) our interior and spiritual goods, our merits, virtues, and good works, past, present, and future.”¹⁷⁹⁵

To have a clear understanding of this oblation, we must distinguish in our good works between what is incommunicable to others and what is communicable to other souls. What is incommunicable in our good works is merit, properly so called (*de condigno*), which constitutes a right in justice to an increase of charity and to eternal life. These personal merits are incommunicable; in this respect they differ from those of Jesus Christ who, being constituted the head of humanity and our pledge, could merit for us in strict justice.

Consequently, if we offer our merits, properly so called, to the Blessed Virgin, it is not that she may give them to other souls, but that she may preserve them, make them fructify, and, if we should have the misfortune to lose them through mortal sin, that

she may obtain for us the grace of so fervent a contrition that it may enable us to recover not only the state of grace, but the degree of grace lost; so that if we have lost five talents, we may recover these five, and not merely two or three.¹⁷⁹⁶

What is communicable to others in our good works is congruous merit; it is also their satisfactory or reparatory value and their value as impetration or prayer. By congruous merit, based not on justice, but on the charity or friendship which unites us to God (*in jure amicitiae*), we can obtain graces for our neighbor. Thus a good Christian mother draws graces on her children by her virtuous life because God takes into consideration the intentions and good works of this generous mother. Likewise, we can also pray for our neighbor, for his conversion, his progress, for hardened sinners, the agonizing, the souls in purgatory.

Lastly, we can satisfy for others, we can voluntarily accept the punishment due to their sins, expiate them, as Mary did for us at the foot of the cross, and thus draw the divine mercy down upon them. We can also gain indulgences for the souls in purgatory, open to them the treasure of the merits of Christ and the saints, and hasten their deliverance.

If we offer all our vexations and sufferings to Mary in this way, she will send us crosses proportionate to our strength aided by grace to make us labor for the salvation of souls.

Who should be advised to make this consecration as we have explained it? It should not be advised for those who would make it through sentimentality or spiritual pride without comprehending its meaning; but it is fitting to counsel it for truly pious and fervent souls, at first for a time, from one feast of the Blessed Virgin to another, then for a year. Thus one will become penetrated by this spirit of abandonment and later can make this act with fruit for one's whole life.

It has been objected that such an act strips us and does not pay our own debt, which will increase our purgatory. This is the objection made by the devil to St. Bridget when she was preparing to make a similar act. Our Lord made the saint understand that this is the objection of self-love, which forgets the goodness of Mary, who does not let herself be outdone in generosity. By thus stripping oneself, one receives the hundredfold. And indeed the love to which this generous act testifies obtains for us even now the remission of part of our purgatory.

Others object, asking how, after having once and for all given all our prayers to Mary, we can pray especially for our parents and friends. The answer to this question is that the Blessed Virgin knows our duties of charity toward our parents and friends, and, should we forget to pray for them as we ought, she would remind us to do so. Moreover, among our parents and friends there are some who have a particular need of prayers, of which we are often ignorant; but Mary knows their needs and will thus, without our being aware of it, make these souls benefit by our prayers. We can always ask her to favor others.

THE FRUITS OF THIS DEVOTION

St. Grignon de Montfort says¹⁷⁹⁷ that this road to God is easier, and nevertheless more meritorious, and consequently a more perfect, short, and sure road.

First of all, it is an easier way. "One can in truth," he says, "reach divine union by other roads; but it will be by many more crosses and strange deaths, with many more difficulties, which he shall conquer with greater difficulty. He shall have to pass through dark nights, combats, and strange agonies, steep mountains, very sharp thorns, and frightful deserts. But by way of Mary, the passage is more sweet and tranquil. On this road, in truth, are great combats to be fought and great difficulties to be overcome; but this good Mother takes up her position so near her faithful servants to enlighten them in their darkness, to illumine them in their doubts, to sustain them in their struggles and difficulties that in reality this virginal road to find Jesus Christ is a road of roses and honey compared with other roads." Evidence of this fact appears in the lives of saints who more particularly followed this way, such as St. Ephrem, St. John Damascene, St. Bernard, St. Bonaventure, St. Bernardine of Siena, St. Francis de Sales.

The vision of St. Francis of Assisi in this connection is well known. One day the saint saw his sons trying to reach our Lord by a ladder that was red and very steep; after climbing a few rungs, they would fall back. Our Lord then showed St. Francis another ladder, white and much less steep, at whose summit appeared the Blessed Virgin, and He said to Francis: "Advise your sons to go by the ladder of My Mother."

By way of Mary the road is easier because the Blessed Virgin supports us by her gentleness; nevertheless it is a more meritorious road because Mary obtains for us a greater charity, which is the principle of merit. The difficulties to be overcome are certainly an occasion of merit, but the principle of merit is charity, the love of God, by which we triumph over these difficulties. We should remember that Mary merited more by her easiest acts, such as a simple prayer, than did the martyrs in their torments, for she put more love of God into these easy acts than the saints did in heroic acts. Since the road by way of Mary is easier and more meritorious, it is shorter, surer, and more perfect; more easily traveled, progress on it is more rapid. By submission to the Mother of God, a person makes greater progress in a short time than he would make in many years relying excessively on his own personal prudence. Under the direction of her whom the Incarnate Word obeyed, he walks with giant steps.

This road is also more perfect, since through Mary the Word of God came down perfectly to us without losing anything of

His divinity; through her, very little souls can ascend even to the Most High without fearing anything. She purifies our good works and increases their value when she presents them to her Son.

Lastly, it is a surer road, on which we are better preserved from the illusions of the devil who seeks to deceive us, imperceptibly at first, that later he may lead us into great sin. On this road we are also preserved from the illusions of day-dreaming and sentimentality. In the subordination of the causes that transmit divine grace, Mary exercises, in fact, a salutary influence on our sensibility; she calms it, rules it, to enable the elevated part of our soul to receive the influence of our Lord more fruitfully. In addition, Mary herself is to our sensible faculties a most pure and holy object, which lifts our soul toward union with God. She gives us great interior liberty, and, on our urgent petition, she sometimes obtains our immediate deliverance from the deviations of our sensible appetites which hinder prayer and intimate union with our Lord. The purpose of the entire influence of Mary Mediatrix is to lead us to the intimacy of Jesus, as He Himself leads us to the Father.

It is advisable to ask for Mary's particular assistance at the moment of Holy Communion that she may make us share in her profound piety and love, as if she were to lend us her most pure heart to receive our Lord worthily. We may with profit make our thanksgiving in the same way.

We shall conclude by giving the essential parts of the consecration of oneself to Jesus Christ through Mary's hands:

O Eternal and Incarnate Wisdom! O most amiable and adorable Jesus, true God and true Man, I thank Thee for having annihilated Thyself, taking the form of a slave, to draw me from the slavery of the devil.... I have recourse to the intercession of Thy most holy Mother, whom Thou hast given me as a Mediatrix. By this means I hope to obtain from Thee contrition and the pardon of my sins, the acquisition and preservation of wisdom.

Hail, Immaculate Mary, Queen of heaven and earth, to whom everything under God is subject. Hail, safe Refuge of sinners, whose mercy fails no one; hear and grant my desires for divine wisdom, and to that end receive the vows and offerings that my baseness presents to thee.

I, an unfaithful sinner, today renew and ratify in thy hands my baptismal vows. I forever renounce Satan, his works and pomps, and I give myself completely to Jesus Christ, Incarnate Wisdom, to carry my cross after Him all the days of my life. And that I may be more faithful to Him than I have been hitherto, I choose thee, O Mary, for my mother.

I give and consecrate to thee my body and soul, my interior and exterior goods, and the very value of my good works past, present, and future. Present me to thy Son and grant me the grace to obtain true wisdom from God, and for that purpose to place myself in the number of those whom thou dost love, teach, lead, feed, and protect. O faithful Virgin, render me in all things so perfect a disciple and imitator of Incarnate Wisdom, Jesus Christ, thy Son, that by thy intercession and example, I may attain to the plenitude of His age on earth and His glory in heaven. Amen.¹⁷⁹⁸

The Universal Accessibility of the Mysticism of The Imitation

At this point in our study, we shall examine in the light of *The Imitation of Jesus Christ* the question proposed at the beginning of this work: namely, whether the infused contemplation of the mysteries of faith and the union with God resulting from it are in the normal way of sanctity, and also what are the dispositions ordinarily required to obtain such a grace.

The Imitation is not a didactic treatise; it is the experimental story of a soul in love with perfection, a story written from day to day, following prayer that is now laborious, now full of light and heavenly inebriation. It is certainly not only an ascetical book but also a mystical book; it leads to the practice of the virtues, but in view of contemplation and union with God. It is manifestly addressed to all interior souls, and in reality all read it. This is equivalent to saying that the true mysticism of which it speaks is accessible to all, if they are willing to follow the way of humility, the cross, continual prayer, and docility to the Holy Ghost. This fact is one of the strongest reasons in favor of the affirmative answer to the question proposed.

As Father Dumas, S.M., writes in his beautiful study on *The Imitation*: “*The Imitation* has a beauty, a virtue which touches, moves, and captivates infirm, indifferent, even unbelieving hearts. Yet it is not addressed primarily to sinners or to beginners; it assumes that some progress in virtue has already been made. It eagerly seeks nothing less than to raise us to contemplation and the intimate consolations of the life of union.”¹⁷⁹⁹

“Contemplation, intimate union with God, is the end, the destiny, and consequently the imperious need of our soul, which can find rest and peace only in God. And it is because *The Imitation* gives a glimpse of this peace and rest, while directing the soul toward union with the supreme Good, that every soul, even though very imperfect, experiences on reading this book—which in reality it only half understands—a comforting sweetness impossible to explain. Our purpose is to show the essentially mystical character of *The Imitation*, to see whether, according to it, the infused contemplation of the mysteries of faith and the union with God resulting from it are highly desirable for all, and then to point out what ascetical dispositions, according to *The Imitation*, are ordinarily required to receive such a grace.

THE MYSTICAL CHARACTER OF THE IMITATION

Is it true that *The Imitation* is an essentially mystical and not only an ascetical book?

By the mystical knowledge of God we understand that knowledge obtained, not by rational speculations or only by faith, but by a special inspiration of the Holy Ghost in prayer. It is a quasiexperimental knowledge of God, according to St. Thomas,¹⁸⁰⁰ which proceeds from faith vivified by love and enlightened by the gifts of understanding and of wisdom. St. John of the Cross teaches the same doctrine: “Infused contemplation is a certain inflowing of God into the soul whereby God secretly teaches the soul and instructs it in the perfection of love, without efforts on its own part beyond a loving attention to God, listening to His voice and admitting the light He sends, but without understanding how this is infused contemplation.”¹⁸⁰¹ St. Francis de Sales speaks in similar terms.¹⁸⁰²

The Imitation continually exhorts the interior soul to humility, abnegation, and docility, which will prepare it to receive the grace of contemplation and of union with God. We see this on every page, and more especially in Book I, chapter 3, and in Book II, chapters 31 and 43.

In Book I, chapter 3, we read:

Happy is he whom truth teacheth by itself, not by figures and passing sounds, but as it is In Itself.... Wonderful folly! that, neglecting the things that are useful and necessary, we give our attention unbidden to such as are curious and mischievous.... He to whom the eternal Word speaketh is delivered from a multitude of opinions. From the One Word are all things, and all things speak this One; and this is the Beginning which also speaketh to us. Without Him no man understandeth, or rightly judgeth.

I am oftentimes wearied with the many things I read and hear; in Thee is all I wish or long for. Let all teachers hold their peace, and all created things keep silence in Thy presence; do Thou alone speak to me. The more a man is recollected within himself and interiorly simple, so much the more and deeper things doth he understand without labor; for he receiveth the light of understanding from on high.... The humble knowledge of oneself is a surer way to God than deep researches after science. Knowledge is not to be blamed nor simple acquaintance with things, good in itself and ordained by God; but a good conscience and a virtuous life are always to be preferred.... He is truly prudent who esteemeth all earthly things as naught, that he may win Christ. And he is truly most learned, who doth the will of God, and forsaketh his own will.

This is the knowledge, the understanding, and the wisdom, which come from the Holy Ghost, and which, without His divine inspirations, cannot be preserved.

The author of *The Imitation* also says:

Lord, I stand much in need of a grace yet greater, if I must arrive so far that it may not be in the power of any man or anything created to hinder me....”Who will give me wings like a dove, and I will fly and be at rest?”¹⁸⁰³... And what can be more free than he who desires nothing upon earth? A man ought, therefore, to soar over above everything created, and perfectly to forsake himself, and in ecstasy of mind to stand and see that Thou, the Creator of all, hast nothing like to Thee among creatures.... And this is the reason why there are found so few contemplative persons, because there are few that know how to sequester themselves entirely from perishable creatures. For this a great grace is required, such as may elevate the soul, and lift it up above itself. And unless a man be elevated in spirit, and freed from attachment to all creatures, and wholly united to God, whatever he knows and whatever he has, is of no great importance.... There is a great difference between the wisdom of an illuminated and devout man, and the knowledge of a learned and studious cleric. Far more noble is that learning which flows from above from the divine influence [this is clearly infused contemplation], than that which is laboriously acquired by the industry of man. Many are found to desire contemplation, but they are not careful to practice those things which are required for its attainment. It is also a great impediment that we rest so much upon signs and sensible things and have but little of perfect mortification.¹⁸⁰⁴

This chapter by itself is most significant and shows that the infused contemplation of the mysteries of salvation is highly desirable, that it is in the normal way of sanctity.

Farther on we find these words put on our Lord’s lips:

I am He that in an instant elevateth the humble mind to comprehend more reasons of the eternal truth than if anyone had studied ten years in the schools. I teach without noise of words, without confusion of opinions, without ambition of honor, without strife of arguments. I am He who teacheth to despise earthly things, to loathe things present, to seek things eternal, to relish them... to desire nothing out of Me, and above all things ardently to love Me. For a certain person, by loving Me intimately, learned things divine and spoke wonders. He profited more by forsaking all things than by studying subtleties. But to some I speak things common, to others things more particular; to some I sweetly appear in signs and figures, to others in great light I reveal mysteries.... I within am the Teacher of truth, the Searcher of the heart, the Understander of thoughts, the Mover of actions, distributing to everyone as I judge fitting.¹⁸⁰⁵

From these excerpts it is evident that the contemplation spoken of by the author of *The Imitation* proceeds from a special inspiration of the Holy Ghost, which renders faith penetrating and sweet by making us taste how good the Lord is: “O taste, and see that the Lord is sweet.”¹⁸⁰⁶ Therefore the contemplation in question here is infused.

It is not a question, however, of extraordinary graces, such as visions, prophetic revelations, and the stigmata, but rather of an increasingly profound and sweet penetration of the mysteries of faith, which are superior to all particular contingent futures, like the end of a war which prophetic light reveals. We see consequently that the infused contemplation of the mysteries of faith, here declared so highly desirable, is undoubtedly an eminent but not an essentially extraordinary grace; it is in the normal way of sanctity. And if at times the term “extraordinary” is applied to it, this is in the sense that it is extrinsically so, because it is rare; but it is not intrinsically so. Far from being essentially extraordinary, it is infused contemplation that establishes us in perfect order. Those only are in this perfect order who penetrate in this way into the inner life of God, who ardently love the One Thing necessary and see all earthly things in their true place. Thus the order of charity is established in all the feelings that are fully subordinated to the love of God and vivified by it.

Therefore, according to *The Imitation* all interior souls are called to this infused contemplation and the union with God resulting from it, at least by a general and remote call, if not by an individual and proximate call, which may be either simply sufficient, or efficacious and victorious over all resistance.¹⁸⁰⁷

In Book IV of *The Imitation*, which is devoted to the Eucharist, the faithful soul asks insistently for the ineffable union with Jesus Christ. We read: “Who will give me, O Lord, to find Thee alone, to open my whole heart to Thee, and enjoy Thee as my soul desireth... that Thou alone mayest speak to me, and I to Thee, as the beloved is wont to speak to his beloved, and a friend to be entertained with a friend. For this I pray, this I desire, that I may be wholly united to Thee, and that... I may more and more learn to relish things heavenly and eternal.... When shall I be wholly united to, and absorbed in Thee, and altogether unmindful of myself? Thou in me, and I in Thee; and thus grant us both equally to continue in one.”¹⁸⁰⁸

We read likewise in chapter 17: “O my God, Eternal Love, my whole good and never-ending happiness, I desire to receive Thee with the most vehement desire and most worthy reverence that any of the saints have ever had or could experience.”

Again he says: “A lover of Jesus and the truth, a true interior person, who is free from inordinate affections, can freely turn himself to God, elevate himself above himself in spirit, and enjoy a delightful repose (*ac fruitive quiescere*).”¹⁸⁰⁹ This is the quiet of fruition, a foretaste of eternal life.

THE DISPOSITIONS REQUIRED OR THE ASCETICISM OF *THE IMITATION*

To receive the special grace of infused contemplation and of the union with God resulting from it, the author of *The Imitation* demands especially the following dispositions: humility, consideration of the immense benefits of God, abnegation, purity of heart, and simplicity of intention.

The humility he requires is that which leads the soul to “love to live unknown and to be counted as nothing.”¹⁸¹⁰ It disposes us to consider the benefactions of God, all the graces that come to us from our Lord, through His passion, His death, the Eucharist. In the light of this consideration, the soul discovers its ingratitude and sincerely begs pardon for it.

In this way the soul is led to the abnegation of all self-will. Consequently in Book III, chapter 13, the Lord is made to say: “Learn to break thy own will and to yield thyself up to all subjections. Kindle wrath against thyself, suffer not the swelling of

pride to live in thee; but show thyself so submissive and little that all may trample on thee, and tread thee under their feet as the dirt of the streets.... But Mine eye hath spared thee, because thy soul was precious in My sight; that thou mightest know My love, and mightest always live thankful for My favors.” Abnegation thus understood puts self-love to death; it is a disappropriation by which the soul ceases to belong to itself that it may belong to God, ceases to seek itself that it may tend continually toward Him. The same doctrine is expressed in Book III, chapter 21. We read also in chapter 37 of the same book: “Forsake thyself, resign thyself, and thou shalt enjoy a great inward peace.”

Purity of heart and simplicity of intention wholly directed toward God prepare the soul to receive the special grace of infused contemplation.¹⁸¹¹ This grace makes the soul understand the profound meaning of these words: “Whoever findeth Jesus findeth a good treasure, a good above every good.”¹⁸¹²

From this contemplation are born the trusting abandonment and union, expressed in the following petition: “Thou dost will, O my God, that I receive Thee and unite myself to Thee in love. Wherefore, I beseech Thy clemency, and I beg of Thee to give me a special grace, that I may be wholly dissolved in Thee, and overflow with Thy love, and no more concern myself about seeking any other consolation.”¹⁸¹³ With this in mind, one may grasp the depths of the splendid chapter 5 of Book III on the marvelous effects of divine love which “carrieth the burden without being burdened, and maketh all else that is bitter sweet and savory. The noble love of Jesus impelleth us to do great things, and exciteth us always to desire that which is the more perfect.... Nothing is sweeter than love, nothing stronger, nothing higher, nothing wider, nothing more pleasant, nothing fuller or better in heaven or in earth: for love is born of God, and it cannot rest but in God.”

In a mortified soul which no longer seeks itself, such is the fruit of the contemplation of the sovereign Good: that union with God which is truly the normal prelude of the union of eternity.

The passages we have quoted clearly demonstrate the truth of the statement made at the beginning of this chapter: namely, that *The Imitation* is not only an ascetical but also a mystical book; it leads to the practice of the virtues in view of the infused contemplation of the goodness of God and of union with Him. Manifestly addressed to all interior souls, *The Imitation* is, in fact, read by all of them. In other words, the true mysticism of which it speaks is accessible to all, if they are willing to follow the way of humility, abnegation, persevering prayer, and docility to the Holy Ghost.

This is one of the strongest reasons in favor of the doctrine we set forth in this work on the normal prelude of eternal life.

Contemplative Prayer

THE PASSAGE FROM ACQUIRED PRAYER TO INITIAL INFUSED PRAYER

Our treatment of docility to the Holy Ghost, of the infinite value of the Mass, of the Communion of proficients, and of the mysticism of *The Imitation*, prepares us to consider what should be the contemplative prayer of those who advance in the illuminative way.

We treated in Volume I ¹⁸¹⁴ of the mental prayer of beginners, of its progressive simplification, and of perseverance in this interior prayer. In our discussion of the prayer of proficients we shall see, first of all, how St. Francis de Sales sums up the traditional teaching on this point, using the principles of St. Thomas to illuminate his doctrine. Next, we shall see what constitutes the beginning of contemplative prayer in the opinion of St. Teresa and St. John of the Cross, which will enable us to get some idea of how it should develop.

THE PASSAGE FROM MEDITATION TO CONTEMPLATION ACCORDING TO THE TRADITIONAL TEACHING EXPRESSED BY ST. FRANCIS DE SALES

The holy Bishop of Geneva sets forth his teaching on this subject in his *Treatise on the Love of God*. ¹⁸¹⁵ In the *Introduction to a Devout Life*, ¹⁸¹⁶ he had already described meditation, which is an act of the understanding by which it makes one or more considerations in order to excite our affections for God and divine things. The mind meditates on a subject with the aid of the imagination and of discourse or reasoning. Resolutions must be made after the affections, and the meditation should end with thanksgiving, with an offering of self, and a petition to God to grant us His grace that we may put into practice the resolutions He has inspired in us.

But if one perseveres in this way, meditation becomes simplified affective prayer in which the various acts tend to fuse into a single act. Thus the faithful soul is gradually raised to contemplation, which is “a loving, simple, and fixed attention of the mind on divine things.” ¹⁸¹⁷ At this moment the life of the soul is entirely simple and concentrated on the object that it loves; the soul looks with a simple gaze at a perfection of God, especially at His goodness, or the radiation of it in some divine work. ¹⁸¹⁸

Consequently, says St. Francis de Sales, “prayer is called meditation until it has produced the honey of devotion; after that it changes into contemplation.... Thus, as bees draw nectar from the flowers, we meditate to gather the love of God, but, having gathered it, we contemplate God and are attentive to His goodness because of the sweetness that love makes us find in it.” ¹⁸¹⁹ In other words, meditation prepares for the act of love of God, whereas contemplation follows it.

From this fact springs a second difference: “Meditation considers in minute detail and, as it were, item by item the objects that are suitable to excite our love; but contemplation gazes with simplicity and concentration on the object that it loves.” ¹⁸²⁰ We no longer linger over one detail or another; we attain to a general view which dwells on God with admiration and love, as the gaze of an artist rests on nature, or that of a child on his mother’s features.

A third difference springs from the two preceding: whereas meditation is not made without effort, “contemplation is made with pleasure, in that it presupposes that one has found God and His holy love.” ¹⁸²¹ Nevertheless contemplation has its hours of dark night in which the soul, now eager for God, keenly feels His absence by reason of the ardent desire it has to possess Him, a desire in which it unites itself in trial to His good pleasure. ¹⁸²²

St. Francis de Sales concludes: “Holy contemplation being the end and the purpose to which all spiritual exercises tend, they are all reduced to it, and those who practice them are called contemplatives.” ¹⁸²³ However, on the subject of the loving recollection of the soul in contemplation, the holy doctor adds: “We do not make this recollection by choice, inasmuch as it is not in our power to have it whenever we wish; it does not depend on our care; but God produces it in us when it pleases Him by His most holy grace.” ¹⁸²⁴

THE PRINCIPLES OF THIS TRADITIONAL TEACHING ACCORDING TO ST. THOMAS

The teaching of St. Francis de Sales, which we have just quoted, springs from the very notion of supernatural contemplation such as we find it in the works of St. Thomas.

St. Thomas shows in the *Summa* ¹⁸²⁵ that contemplation is an act of the intellect superior to reasoning, a simple view of the truth; ¹⁸²⁶ and, when it is a question not of philosophical contemplation, but of that contemplation which the saints speak of, it

springs from love, not only from the love of the knowledge habitual to philosophers, but from the love of God, from charity.¹⁸²⁷ It proceeds consequently from living faith enlightened by the gifts of the Holy Ghost, especially by those of understanding and wisdom, which render faith penetrating and sweet.¹⁸²⁸ Supernatural contemplation thus conceived supposes the special inspiration of the Holy Ghost, which His gifts dispose us to receive with promptness and docility,¹⁸²⁹ as the wide-spread sails on a boat receive the impulsion of a favorable wind; then the boat advances more easily than by the labor of the rowers, a symbol of discursive meditation united to the practice of the virtues. From this point of view, contemplation, because of the special inspiration which it supposes, deserves to be called, not acquired but infused, although at the beginning it may quite frequently be prepared for by reading, affective meditation, and the prayer of petition.¹⁸³⁰ The soul thus actively prepares itself to receive the special inspiration of the Holy Ghost, which will at times be strong enough so that discursive meditation will no longer be necessary, as when a favorable wind is strong enough to make the boat advance, the work of the rowers may cease.

This special inspiration of the Holy Ghost given to make us taste the mysteries of faith, uses the connaturality or sympathy with divine things that is rooted in charity.¹⁸³¹ This special inspiration gives rise in us to an act of infused love and of living, penetrating, and sweet faith, which shows us how revealed mysteries, although still obscure, wonderfully correspond to our deepest and loftiest aspirations. These acts of love and of penetrating and sweet faith are said to be infused, not only because they proceed from infused virtues, in this case from the theological virtues, but because they suppose a special inspiration of the Holy Ghost, and because we cannot move ourselves to them with the help of common actual grace. In this case God moves us, not by inclining us to deliberate, but to acts above all discursive deliberation.¹⁸³² For example, on reading the Gospel of the day at Mass, some expression that we have read many times is illuminated and captivates us, such as the words of Jesus to the Samaritan woman: “If thou didst know the gift of God!”¹⁸³³ In like manner a preacher vividly experiences this illumination we are speaking of when at first he feels deeply his powerlessness to preach the Passion in a fitting manner on Good Friday, and then receives the animating breath which vivifies his thought, his will and his feelings, that he may do good to souls.

At times contemplation rises toward God by a straight movement from a sensible fact, for example, from a parable such as that of the prodigal son, to the wonderful vision of the divine mercy.¹⁸³⁴ At other times contemplation rises by an oblique movement, for example, from the mysteries of salvation, from those of the childhood of our Savior and of His passion, to the living and profound thought of eternal life.

Lastly, there is occasionally contemplation, called circular, of the infinite goodness of God which radiates on all things, on all the mysteries of salvation. This prayer is a very simple, most loving gaze, which reminds one of the circular flight of the eagle high up in the air, hovering as it gazes at the sun and its radiation over the horizon.¹⁸³⁵

These principles thus formulated by St. Thomas illumine the traditional teaching on contemplative prayer which we found expressed in the works of St. Francis de Sales. This same teaching appears also in a concrete and experiential form in the writings of St. Teresa.

THE ACQUIRED PRAYER OF RECOLLECTION AND PASSIVE RECOLLECTION ACCORDING TO ST. TERESA

The passage from acquired to infused prayer is illumined in the light of what St. Teresa wrote about the last of the acquired prayers which she calls “the acquired prayer of recollection,”¹⁸³⁶ and about initial infused prayer, which she calls “supernatural or passive recollection.”¹⁸³⁷

The saint describes the last or the highest of the acquired prayers as follows:

It is called (active) “recollection,” because *by its means the soul collects together all the faculties and enters within itself*¹⁸³⁸ to be with God. The divine Master thus comes more speedily than He otherwise would to teach it and to grant the prayer of quiet. For, being retired within itself, the spirit can meditate on the Passion and can there picture in its thoughts the Son, and can offer Him to the Father without tiring the mind by journeying to find Him on Mount Calvary, or in the garden, or at the column.

Those who are able thus to enclose themselves within the little heaven of their soul where dwells the Creator of both heaven and earth, and who can accustom themselves not to look at anything nor to remain in any place which would preoccupy their exterior senses, may feel sure that they are traveling by an excellent way, and that they will certainly attain to drink of the water from the fountain, for they will journey far in a short time. They resemble a man who goes by sea, and who, if the weather is favorable, gets in a few days to the end of a voyage which would have taken far longer by land. These souls may be said to have already put out to sea, and though they have not quite lost sight of land, still they *do their best* to get away from it by recollecting their faculties.

If this recollection is genuine it is easily discerned, for it produces a certain effect that I cannot describe, but which will be recognized by those who know it from personal experience. The soul seems to rise from play—for it sees that earthly things are but toys—and therefore mounts to higher things. Like one who retires into a strong fortress to be out of danger, it withdraws the senses from outward things, so thoroughly despising them that involuntarily the eyes close so as to veil from the sight what is visible, in order that the eyes of the soul may see more clearly. Those who practice this prayer almost always keep their eyes shut during it. This is an excellent custom for many reasons.... The soul appears to gather strength and to dominate itself at the expense of the body.... By persevering in the habit [of

recollecting itself] for several days, and by controlling ourselves, the benefits that result will become clear. We shall find that when we begin to pray the bees (symbol of the different faculties) will return to the hive and enter it to make the honey without any effort on our part, for our Lord is pleased to reward the soul and the will by this empire over the powers in return for the time spent in restraining them. Thus the mind only requires to make them a sign that it wishes to be recollected, and the senses will immediately obey us and retire within themselves.... When the will recalls them they return more quickly, until after they have re-entered a number of times, our Lord is pleased that they should settle entirely in perfect contemplation.¹⁸³⁹

These last words refer to infused prayer, prepared for by active prayer or the acquired prayer of recollection, just described and also called simplified affective prayer.¹⁸⁴⁰ The very slow and loving meditation on some of the petitions of the Our Father is a good preparation for it.¹⁸⁴¹ Thus acquired prayer prepares the soul for infused prayer.¹⁸⁴²

St. Teresa describes initial infused prayer, that of supernatural or passive recollection, which precedes the prayer of quiet, as follows:

This is a kind of recollection which, I believe, is *supernatural* (like the prayer of quiet). There is no occasion to retire nor to shut the eyes, nor does it depend on anything exterior; involuntarily the eyes suddenly close and solitude is found. *Without any labor of one's own*, the temple of which I spoke is reared for the soul in which to pray; the senses and exterior surroundings appear to lose their hold, while the spirit gradually regains its lost sovereignty....

But do not fancy you can gain it [this recollection] by thinking of God dwelling within you, or by imagining Him as present in your soul.... *By the divine assistance everyone can practice it*, but what I mean is quite a different thing. Sometimes, before they have begun to think of God,... *the soul is keenly conscious of a delicious sense of recollection*.... Here it is not in our power to retire into ourselves, unless God gives us the grace. In my opinion, His Majesty only bestows this favor on those who have renounced the world.... He thus specially calls them to devote themselves to spiritual things; if they allow Him power to act freely, He will bestow still greater graces on those whom He thus begins calling to a higher life.¹⁸⁴³

The saint adds: "Unless His Majesty has begun to suspend our faculties, I cannot understand how we are to stop thinking, without doing ourselves more harm than good,"¹⁸⁴⁴ for then we would remain in idleness or the somnolence of the quietists.

"The supernatural recollection" which St. Teresa describes in the preceding passages is clearly a mystical prayer, the beginning of infused contemplation, for which simplified affective meditation prepares the soul.¹⁸⁴⁵

What we have just said about the beginning of infused contemplation according to the teaching of St. Francis de Sales and St. Teresa conforms perfectly to what St. John of the Cross teaches when, in *The Dark Night*,¹⁸⁴⁶ he treats of the night of the senses, or the passive purification of the sensible faculties, which in his opinion marks, as we have seen,¹⁸⁴⁷ the transition from the purgative to the illuminative way. In *The Dark Night* he says expressly: "The night of sense is common, and the lot of many: these are the beginners."¹⁸⁴⁸ And he adds: "The soul began to set out on the way of the spirit, the way of proficients, which is also called the illuminative way, or the way of infused contemplation, wherein God Himself teaches and refreshes the soul without meditation or any active efforts that itself may deliberately make."¹⁸⁴⁹ The work of the virtues should certainly continue at times even to heroic acts, but prayer becomes increasingly simplified, and the soul ought especially to be docile to the inspiration of the Holy Ghost.

St. John of the Cross agrees perfectly with St. Thomas when he writes: "Contemplation is the science of love, which is an infused loving knowledge of God."¹⁸⁵⁰ "This dark contemplation is called secret, because it is, as I have said before, the mystical theology which theologians call secret wisdom, and which according to St. Thomas¹⁸⁵¹ is infused into the soul more especially by love. This happens in a secret hidden way.... The faculties of the soul cannot acquire it, it being the Holy Ghost who infuses it into the soul."¹⁸⁵² It is the eminent exercise of the theological virtues and of the gifts which accompany them. If this infused and loving contemplation lasts for a certain time, it is called a state of prayer, a passive state or at least one that is more passive than active, for we cannot produce it, but only prepare ourselves for it. This teaching is identical with that of *The Imitation* and thus lends additional confirmation to the statement in *The Imitation* quoted in the preceding chapter: "There are found so few contemplative persons, because there are few that know how to sequester themselves entirely from perishable creatures."¹⁸⁵³ In other words, the infused contemplation of revealed mysteries, which proceeds from living faith illumined by the gifts of the Holy Ghost, is in the normal way of sanctity or of heaven, provided we persevere in prayer, carry our cross daily in a supernatural manner, and are docile to the Holy Ghost. Then living faith becomes during prayer penetrating and often sweet, in such a way that we can live profoundly by the revealed mysteries of the redemptive Incarnation, the Mass, the indwelling of the Blessed Trinity in our souls; we can live profoundly by them and taste them; this is the normal prelude of the life of heaven.

The Errors of the Quietists on Contemplation and Pure love

We find in the condemnation of several errors a confirmation of the traditional doctrine on initial infused prayer which we have just set forth. We shall consider the errors of quietism, then those of semi-quietism.

THE QUIETISM OF MOLINOS

The propositions of Molinos, which were condemned in 1687,^{[1854](#)} show that quietism deviates from the traditional doctrine to the point of becoming a caricature of Catholic mysticism, which it perverts in its most fundamental principles.

According to Molinos, man should annihilate his faculties, for the desire to act offends God, who wishes to be the only one to act in us. Activity is the enemy of grace, vows to accomplish certain acts are an obstacle to perfection. In refraining from acting, the soul annihilates itself and returns to its principle; then God reigns and lives in it. Such is the interior way, in which the soul no longer produces acts of knowledge, or of love of God, and no longer thinks of eternal life, or of the sufferings of hell. It ought not to desire to know whether it is pleasing to God, nor reflect on its acts, nor on its defects to be corrected; it should not desire its own perfection, its salvation, nor ask God for anything definite. It no longer needs to resist temptations, with which it should no longer concern itself.^{[1855](#)}

In prayer, according to the quietists, man must remain in obscure faith, in a repose in which he forgets every distinct thought relative to the humanity of Christ, or even to the divine perfections, to the Blessed Trinity. He must remain in this repose without producing any act. As for the knowledge of obscure faith, it is not an act produced by the creature, but a knowledge coming from God alone; it is, said Molinos, an acquired contemplation which is acquired by the cessation of our own operations.^{[1856](#)}

It is evident, therefore, that this acquired contemplation, which Molinos advised for all, was a passivity acquired at will by the cessation of every operation. Consequently he attributed to the contemplation acquired in this manner what is true only of infused contemplation, and with one stroke of the pen he suppressed all asceticism and the practice of the virtues, considered by tradition to be the real preparation for infused contemplation and union with God.^{[1857](#)} All spirituality was thus radically perverted.

According to these principles, Molinos maintained that contemplation continues during sleep, that distaste for spiritual things is good; he confounded voluntary spiritual sloth, or *acedia*, with involuntary aridity, which is found in the passive purifications of the senses and the spirit. He went so far as to say that the use of the sacraments and the practice of good works are indifferent matters, and that acquired contemplation leads to impeccability, in which one need no longer resist temptations, even when they lead to immodest acts.^{[1858](#)}

One of the initial errors of Spanish quietism was to consider the prayer of quiet as acquired at will (by the suppression of acts), whereas in reality it is infused, as St. Teresa shows in the fourth mansion of *The Interior Castle*.^{[1859](#)}

In his *Precis de theologie ascetique et mystique* (no. 1484), Father A. Tanquerey juxtaposes exactly the errors of Molinos and Catholic doctrine. We have added several clarifying statements to his outline:

Catholic Doctrine	Errors of Molinos
(1) There is one passive state in which God acts in us by His operating grace; but one reaches it normally only after having practiced the virtues and meditation for a long time.	There is only one way, the interior way or the way of passive contemplation which one can acquire through one's own efforts, with common grace, by the cessation of every operation. One should therefore enter it at once.
(2) The act of contemplation ordinarily lasts only a short time, although the state of soul which results from it may last for several days.	The act of contemplation may last for entire years and even for a lifetime, even during sleep, without being repeated.
(3) Contemplation united to the act of love of God contains eminently the acts of all the christian virtues, but does not dispense us from making explicit acts of these virtues outside the time of contemplation.	Contemplation being perpetual dispenses from all the explicit acts of the virtues, which are only for beginners: for example, acts of faith, hope, religion, mortification, confession, and so forth.
(4) The principal object of contemplation is God Himself, but Christ is the secondary object of it, and outside of the contemplative act one is not dispensed from thinking about Jesus Christ, the necessary Mediator, or from going to God through Him.	It is an imperfection to think of Jesus Christ and His mysteries; it is necessary and sufficient to lose oneself in the divine essence. He who makes use of images or ideas does not adore God in spirit and in truth.
(5) Holy abandonment is a perfect way, but it should not go so far as indifference in regard to eternal salvation on the contrary, one should desire it, hope for it, and ask for it.	In the state of contemplation, one must be indifferent to everything, even to one's own sanctification, to one's salvation, and lose hope that love may be disinterested.
(6) In interior trials the imagination and sensibility may be profoundly troubled, whereas the fine point of the soul enjoys deep peace; but the will is still obliged to resist temptations, at least indirectly by rising above them or creating a diversion in order not to consent to them.	One should not trouble oneself to resist temptations; the most obscene mental images, the acts which result from them are not reprehensible because they are the work of the devil. They are passive trials that the saints themselves experienced, and one must take care not to confess them. In this way one attains to self-contempt, to perfect purity, and to very close union with God.

The quietism of Molinos thus ended in manifestly immoral consequences. It was taken up again in an attenuated form without these consequences by Madame Guyon, who, having been widowed while still young, rushed ardently into an imaginative and emotional piety which she called the way of pure love, or the short road. She won over to her ideas, first of all, Father Lacombe, a Barnabite, then in a measure, Fenelon.¹⁸⁶⁰

SEMI-QUIETISM

The attenuated quietism of Fenelon," which was condemned in 1699,¹⁸⁶¹ had to do with errors relative to pure love. The principal error consisted in teaching that in the state of perfect contemplation the soul enters a sort of complete annihilation, that it is in the presence of God, entirely resigned to His holy will and indifferent to its salvation or damnation.

This doctrine thus failed to recognize the obligation of Christian hope; it forgot that the saints in their greatest trials "against hope believed in hope," according to the expression of St. Paul.¹⁸⁶² It also forgot that to sacrifice the desire of our salvation would be to sacrifice charity itself, which leads us to wish to glorify God eternally by the knowledge and love which the blessed enjoy in heaven.

The divine precepts relative to hope and charity, far from being mutually contradictory, are mutually strengthening. By hope, we desire to possess God without subordinating Him to ourselves;¹⁸⁶³ by charity, which vivifies hope instead of destroying it, we love God for Himself, and in order to glorify Him eternally we desire our own salvation and that of other souls. Thus zeal for the glory of God and the salvation of souls is the ardor of one and the same love, whose first object is God and whose second is ourselves and our neighbor.

Among the errors of semi-quietism the following are also important: "There is a state of contemplation so sublime and perfect that it becomes habitual, to such an extent that each time the soul prays, its prayer is contemplative and not discursive. When this state is reached, the soul need never more return to meditation and methodical acts." "The mystical saints excluded the exercise of the virtues from the state of transformed souls."¹⁸⁶⁴

Fenelon, who submitted humbly to the condemnation, was led into error especially by a falsified edition of the *Entretiens spirituels de saint Francois de Sales*, published at Lyons in 1628 by a certain Drobet. Bossuet, in the course of his controversy with Fenelon, made a deep study of the questions relative to prayer, and it is a known fact that in his opinion the “prayer in faith and of the simple presence of God,” which in its second phase is initial infused contemplation, is in the normal way of sanctity.¹⁸⁶⁵

All the errors contained in the *Maximes des saints*, which were condemned in 1699 in twenty-three propositions,¹⁸⁶⁶ may be reduced, according to Bossuet, to the four following propositions: (1) “There is in this life a *habitual state* of pure love in which the *desire for eternal salvation no longer* exists.(2) In the final trials of the interior life, a soul may be persuaded by an invincible and deliberate conviction that it is reprobated by God, and in this belief it may make the absolute sacrifice of its eternal happiness.(3) In the state of pure love, the soul is indifferent in regard to its own perfection and the practices of virtue.(4) Contemplative souls lose, in certain states, the *distinct, sensible, and reflective view of Jesus Christ*.”¹⁸⁶⁷

We italicized in these propositions what is particularly erroneous. What is true is: (1) that in the perfect the desire of beatitude is often inspired by charity and that there are *moments* in which they do not think explicitly of their salvation.(2) If some saints have had in the lower part of the soul the impression of being reprobate, it was not a reflective persuasion of the higher part, and if they made the sacrifice of their salvation, it was in a conditional and not an absolute manner.(3) Even in the highest states of perfection, the saints recommend concern about *progress* and the *fundamental virtues*.(4) Even in the transforming union, many saints, like St. Teresa, have had visions of our Savior’s *humanity*; what is true is that in certain transitory moments the perfect soul, absorbed in the contemplation of the Deity, does not think explicitly of it.

THE PROBLEM OF PURE LOVE

We treated the question of pure love at length in *The Love of God and the Cross of Jesus*.¹⁸⁶⁸ We shall give here a brief summary of our teaching.

The problems of pure love may be stated as follows: Will our love of God always be tainted by self-love? Is pure love possible, and, if so, what is its relation to love of oneself, which seems to be the basis of our natural tendencies?

The errors to be avoided are mutually contradictory; the truth rises like a summit in the midst of these deviations and above them. Under the pretext of pure love, the quietists went so far as to require the absolute sacrifice of the desire of salvation or of personal happiness,¹⁸⁶⁹ and they said that the saints make this sacrifice in the passive purifications of the spirit. On the other hand, it is possible to fall into a practical naturalism which disregards the spirit of sacrifice and believes that without it one can succeed in loving God perfectly and more than oneself. Evidently the truth is above these two opposing deviations.

The saints have often described ardent love of God, insisting on its disinterestedness and its holy follies.¹⁸⁷⁰ Thus St. Paul writes: “For I wished myself to be an anathema from Christ, for my brethren.”¹⁸⁷¹ St. Thomas explains this passage as follows: “He wished to be deprived for a time of the divine fruition which pertains to love of oneself, in order that God might be honored in his neighbor, which pertains to the love of God.”¹⁸⁷² But the same St. Paul says that in the greatest trials, man must, like Abraham, “against hope believe in hope,”¹⁸⁷³ and therefore never renounce salvation; to do so, moreover, would be to sacrifice charity itself or the desire to glorify God eternally. The sacrifice of our happiness cannot, therefore, be absolute, but only conditional and temporary; further, in the saints it is not a permanent state, but a transport of love lasting some moments.¹⁸⁷⁴

The following difficulty remains to be solved. How is the ardent, disinterested love of the saints reconciled with our natural inclinations, in particular with love of oneself? St. Thomas¹⁸⁷⁵ answers this difficulty by pointing out that by nature we are inclined to love God, the Author and Preserver of our nature, more than ourselves, as in an organism the part naturally loves the whole more than itself, the hand sacrificing itself to save the body. Otherwise the natural inclination which comes from God, the Author of nature, would not be good, and grace, charity, not only would not perfect it, but would destroy it.¹⁸⁷⁶

The natural inclination to love God, the Author of our nature, was attenuated by original sin¹⁸⁷⁷ and by our personal sins, the results of which must be mortified; but it subsists in the depths of our will, and charity elevates this tendency, making us love God, the Author of grace, more than ourselves. Consequently in loving rightly the superior part of ourselves, we love our Creator still more, and to cease to will our own perfection would be to turn away from God.¹⁸⁷⁸ This is what the quietists did not understand when they asked, in the midst of the great passive purifications, not hope against all hope,¹⁸⁷⁹ but the absolute sacrifice of beatitude.¹⁸⁸⁰ This would have constituted at the same time the sacrifice of charity or the desire to glorify God eternally.

They did not understand that by hope we desire God for ourselves, not subordinating Him to ourselves, as a fruit is inferior to us, but subordinating ourselves to Him: “By hope we desire God for ourselves, not because of ourselves,”¹⁸⁸¹ for the ultimate end of the act of hope is God Himself. Further, by charity we love God in a superior manner, formally for Himself, and we then desire to possess Him in order to glorify Him eternally.

Thus perfect charity, far from destroying hope, vivifies it and renders it increasingly meritorious. One thus avoids the two contrary errors of quietism and of naturalism opposed to the spirit of sacrifice; and, during the passive purifications, the love of God and neighbor is increasingly purified of all inordinate self-love or of all self-seeking. Finally, ardent love, under the form of zeal for the glory of God and the salvation of souls, is victorious over all egoism, as we see in the lives of great saints.^{[1882](#)}

IN WHAT THE PRACTICE OF PURE LOVE CONSISTS

The practice of pure love consists chiefly in abandonment to Providence and to the divine will of good pleasure. This act of abandonment supposes faith and hope, and in it there is a love of God that is daily more pure.

The quietists were, therefore, mistaken in excluding hope from the most perfect state; it should be only subordinated to charity, vivified by it, and finally it should become heroic hope “against hope” as we see in the lives of the saints.

The quietists also erred in excluding from the state of perfection attention to the practice of the virtues and positive resistance to temptations. They failed to consider as they should that abandonment to the divine will of good pleasure should be accompanied by conformity to the divine will signified by the precepts, the counsels (at least the spirit of the counsels), and events.^{[1883](#)} It is constant fidelity to the divine will signified from moment to moment that enables man to abandon himself without presumption, with confidence and love, to God’s will of good pleasure, on which the future depends. The signified will is consequently the domain of obedience, and the will of good pleasure that of abandonment. Thus balance is kept above the slothful quiet of the quietists and the fruitless agitation of those who rely on themselves and have no profound prayer.

On this subject St. Francis de Sales,^{[1884](#)} Bossuet,^{[1885](#)} Father Piny,^{[1886](#)} and Father de Caussade^{[1887](#)} may be read with profit. We have treated this question at greater length elsewhere;^{[1888](#)} here we shall give what is essential.

The act of pure love may be considered in three ways: (1) as an exceptional and very rare act; (2) as a continuous exercise; (3) as an ordinary act accessible to all Christians.

1. The exceptional and very rare act of pure love is a close and lofty union with God, found only in already purified souls which, under a special inspiration of the Holy Ghost and without any return on self, no longer actually and explicitly think of their own beatitude. It was in an act of this kind that St. Paul, *in excessu mentis*, desired to be deprived for a time of the joy of possessing God that, by this sacrifice, he might obtain the conversion of his brethren.^{[1889](#)}

2. The continual exercise of the act of pure love was proposed by the quietists as the state of perfection. In reality, this act exists with continuity only in heaven.

3. The ordinary act of pure love accessible to all Christians is the act of charity by which one loves God with appreciative love, above all, because He is infinitely good and better than all His gifts, while tending to love Him with intensive love, more than all, which will be realized in heaven.^{[1890](#)} This act corresponds to the supreme precept of love, a precept that makes it the duty of all to tend to perfect charity.^{[1891](#)}

The Degrees of Contemplative Prayer in Proficients

We have seen the nature of contemplative prayer and the difference between the last acquired prayer and initial infused prayer. We shall now consider the various degrees of infused prayer in proficients. These degrees are set forth in the works of St. Teresa¹⁸⁹² and in those of St. Francis de Sales.¹⁸⁹³ We shall give the essential part of their teaching and then apply this doctrine to fervent Communion.

THE PROGRESS OF PRAYER AND THE VIRTUES

The degrees of contemplative prayer are chiefly those of the growing intensity of living faith, of charity, and of the gifts of the Holy Ghost which correspond to them. This growing intensity of union with God manifests itself in a way by the progressive extension of this state to the different faculties of the soul, which are gradually captivated by God, so that little by little the distractions which come from an agitated and intractable imagination cease. Besides, and this point is especially important, the virtues grow as a rule with the progress of prayer.

St. Teresa¹⁸⁹⁴ makes this truth clear by comparing the degrees of prayer to four ways of watering a garden. First, water may be drawn from a well by main force;¹⁸⁹⁵ this is the figure of discursive meditation, which contributes to the growth of the virtues. The second way of watering consists in drawing up the water with a waterwheel, called a *noria*; this is the symbol of the prayer of quiet, which is prepared by work that disposes the soul to it. At this time the flowers of the virtues are about to appear.¹⁸⁹⁶

A third way of watering consists in irrigating the garden with running water from a river; the virtues draw far more vigor from this prayer than from the preceding one, and their flowers bloom.¹⁸⁹⁷

Lastly, the fourth water, which is rain, symbolizes the prayer of union given by God without human labor. "The soul draws from this prayer much more abundant fruits, its humility increases. It is here that are born heroic promises and resolutions, burning desires, horror of the world (of its spirit), the clear view of vanity."¹⁸⁹⁸

Consequently Pius X, in his letter (March 7, 1914) on St. Teresa's doctrine, says: "The degrees of prayer enumerated by her are so many superior ascents toward the summit of Christian perfection."¹⁸⁹⁹

St. John of the Cross speaks in similar terms. He shows in particular that in the night of the senses, or passive purification of the sensibility, there is in the midst of aridity an initial infused contemplation, accompanied by an ardent desire for God.¹⁹⁰⁰ It is an arid quiet, often spoken of by St. Jane de Chantal, which prepares the soul for the consoled quiet described by St. Teresa in the fourth mansion.

THE PRAYER OF QUIET

In sweet quiet, which corresponds to the second way of watering, that is, with the pump, "the will alone is captivated"¹⁹⁰¹ by the living light that manifests the sweet presence of God in us and His goodness. At this moment the gift of piety, which is in the will itself, disposes it to an entirely filial affection toward God. This state has been compared to that of a little child who relishes the milk given it. Or better, it is like the springing up of the living water which Jesus spoke of to the Samaritan woman. "The other fountain... receives the water from the source itself, which signifies God... We experience the greatest peace, calm, and sweetness in the inmost depths of our being... The whole physical part of our nature shares in this delight and sweetness... They [the celestial waters] appear to dilate and enlarge us internally, and benefit us in an inexplicable manner, nor does even the soul itself understand what it receives."¹⁹⁰²

However, in this state, the intellect, the memory, and the imagination are not yet captivated by the divine action. Sometimes they are the auxiliaries of the will and are occupied in its service; at other times their cooperation serves only to trouble it. Then, says St. Teresa, the will should "take no more notice of the understanding (or imagination) than it would of an idiot."¹⁹⁰³

This sweet quiet, called also the prayer of divine tastes or of silence, is, moreover, often interrupted by the aridities and trials of the night of the senses,¹⁹⁰⁴ by temptations which oblige the soul to a salutary reaction. The effects of the prayer of quiet are greater virtue, especially greater love of God and ineffable peace, at least in the higher part of the soul.¹⁹⁰⁵

The prayer of quiet described by St. Teresa in the fourth mansion has three distinct phases: (1) passive recollection, which is a sweet and loving absorption of the will in God by a special grace; (2) quiet, properly so called, in which the will is captivated by God, whether it remains silent or prays with a sort of spiritual transport; (3) the sleep of the powers, when, the

will remaining captive, the understanding ceases to discourse and is itself seized by God, although the imagination and the memory continue to be disturbed.¹⁹⁰⁶

The conduct to be observed in the prayer of quiet is that of humble abandonment in the hands of God. No effort should be made to place oneself in this state, which can come only from a special grace of the Holy Ghost, who at times inclines the soul to a loving silence, at others to affections which gush forth as from a spring. If the understanding and imagination wander, the soul must not be disturbed about it, or go in search of them; the will should remain and enjoy the favor it receives, like a wise bee in the depths of its retreat.¹⁹⁰⁷

THE PRAYER OF SIMPLE UNION

If the soul is faithful not only in attentively accomplishing all its daily duties, but in listening with docility to the inspirations of the Holy Ghost, who becomes more exacting in proportion as He gives more, what happens as a rule? The soul is then raised to a higher degree, called “simple union.” The action of God at this time becomes strong enough to absorb completely the interior faculties of the soul; God is the object of all its activity, which no longer wanders abroad. Not only the will is captivated by God, but also the thoughts and the memory; in addition, the soul has, as it were, the certitude of the divine presence. The imagination is no longer restless, but calmed; at times it is as if asleep, in order to allow the higher faculties of the intellect and will to be united to God. The special grace given by the Holy Ghost is then like running water coming from a river.

It even happens that all the soul’s activity occurs in its higher, part, to such an extent that there is suspension of the exercise of the exterior senses, that is, a beginning of ecstasy, or ecstasy properly so called. If the mathematician who is absorbed in his research no longer hears what is said to him, with even greater reason is this true of him who is thus strongly drawn by God.

The soul then receives the salutary water that refreshes and purifies it like rain falling from heaven. According to St. Teresa, God “will leave us no share in them [His wondrous works] except complete conformity of our wills to His.”¹⁹⁰⁸ “How beautiful is the soul after having been immersed in God’s grandeur and united closely to Him for but a short time! Indeed, I do not think it is ever as long as half an hour.”¹⁹⁰⁹

St. Teresa points out also that the prayer of union is quite often incomplete, without suspension of the imagination and the memory, which sometimes wage a veritable war on the intellect.¹⁹¹⁰ It is of this incomplete mystical union that St. Teresa is speaking in *The Interior Castle* when she says: “Is it necessary, in order to attain to his kind of divine union, for the powers of the soul to be suspended? No; God has many ways of enriching the soul and bringing it to these mansions besides what might be called a ‘short cut.’”¹⁹¹¹

The effects of the prayer of union are most sanctifying; there is something like a transformation of the soul similar to the metamorphosis of the silkworm into a butterfly. The soul feels great contrition for its sins; it experiences an ardent zeal to make God known and loved and to serve Him, suffers greatly at the sight of the loss of sinners, glimpses what the sufferings of our Lord must have been. Then the heroic practice of the virtues really begins, especially perfect submission to the will of God and great love for one’s neighbor.¹⁹¹² The martyrs have at times had this prayer in the midst of their torments.¹⁹¹³

These prayers of sweet quiet and of simple union correspond to those which, in the opinion of St. John of the Cross, are found between the passive purification of the senses and that of the spirit.¹⁹¹⁴ St. Teresa, in the first chapter of the sixth mansion, speaks clearly of the purification of the spirit, as we shall see later on when we treat of arid union and of ecstatic union which precede the transforming union.¹⁹¹⁵

CONTEMPLATIVE PRAYER AND FERVENT COMMUNION

Contemplative prayer, which we have just discussed, enables us to glimpse the depths of the Sacrifice of the Mass and of Communion, in which the Word of God made flesh gives Himself to us to be the food of our souls and to incorporate us more intimately in Himself, while quickening us.

St. Thomas Aquinas must have had a high degree of contemplative prayer when he composed the Office and the Mass for the feast of Corpus Christi. We shall note here some of its principal parts.

In Vespers, the responsory recalls the parable of the guests. Several, preoccupied with their own affairs or pleasures, declined to come; then the Lord invited the poor and at the Holy Table gave Himself to them as food. This is the loftiest interpretation of the parable of the guests.¹⁹¹⁶

In the antiphon of the Magnificat at First Vespers, we read: “How sweet is Thy spirit, O Lord, who, to show Thy tenderness to Thy children, hast given them a most sweet bread from heaven; Thou dost fill the hungry with good things and sendest the rich, who have not this hunger, away empty.”

The Introit of the Mass recalls the words of the Psalmist: “He fed them with the fat of wheat”;¹⁹¹⁷ this wheat is Himself, for the bread has been changed into the substance of His body, which suffered for us on the cross. When we receive it, there is a

spiritual and vivifying contact, which should daily become more intimate, between our poor soul and the holy soul of the Word made flesh, for He Himself said: “He that eateth My flesh and drinketh My blood abideth in Me, and I in him.”^{[1918](#)}

Contemplation rises with the sequence:

Lauda, Sion, Salvatorem,
lauda ducem et pastorem,
in hymnis et canticis.
Quantum potes, tantum aude,
quia major omni laude,
nec laudare sufficis

Sion, lift thy voice, and sing,
Praise thy Savior and thy King,
Praise with hymns thy Shepherd true;
Strive thy best to praise Him well;
Yet doth He all praise excel;
None can ever reach His due.

The end of the sequence shows us in Communion the prelude of the life of heaven:

Tu, qui cuncta scis et vales,
qui nos pascis bic mortales:
tuos ibi commensales,
Coheredes et sodales,
fac sanctorum civium.
Amen, Alleluia.

Thou, who feedest us below!
Source of all we have or know!
Grant that with Thy saints above,
Sitting at the feast of love,
We may see Thee face to face.
Amen. Alleluia.

In our pilgrimage toward eternity, we are nourished by the Eucharist, like the prophet Elias who, when obliged to walk even to Mount Horeb, was sustained by a loaf of bread brought to him by an angel.^{[1919](#)}

The hymn for Matins of this feast of the Blessed Sacrament ends in the contemplation of infinite riches inclining toward extreme poverty:

Panis angelicus fit panis hominum;
Dat panis coelicus figuris terminum.
O res mirabilis! manducat Dominum
Pauper, servus et humilis!

The bread of angels becomes the bread of men.
The bread of heaven puts an end to figures.
O wonderful truth! Man, the poor, the slave, the humble,
Eats his Lord.

It is the saving Host which draws infinite Mercy down upon us:

O salutaris Hostia,
Quae coeli pandis ostium:
Bella premunt hostilia,
Da robur, fer auxilium.

O saving Victim,
Opening wide the gates of heaven:
Our foes press on,
Give us strength, bring us help.

We receive this help especially during severe trials or persecutions, when faced with the enemy’s attacks. At such times we more particularly need to live by penetrating and living faith and by the Contemplation of the Eucharistic mystery, and to convince ourselves in fervent Communion of the fact that God alone is great, that He alone is of Himself, that the strongest and most formidable creatures are as nothing in comparison with Him and can do no harm without His permission. Not a hair of our heads will perish unless He has willed or permitted it, says the Gospel.^{[1920](#)} We must convince ourselves in the living light of contemplation that when we say, “God permits evil only for a higher good,” we are uttering not simply a sacred formula, but a truth replete with life. We must firmly and deeply believe that the higher good which God is beginning to realize in us in the

midst of our struggles is an eternal good that will not pass away. We need to believe that profound Christian life is eternal life begun. We must nourish ourselves with these divine truths and, better still, we must nourish ourselves with Christ Himself who is divine subsistent Truth. We need to be vivified by Him, defended by Him, and to receive from Him that living flame of charity which will make us always aspire higher, even to the end of our journey. Such are in every faithful interior soul the fruits of mental prayer and fervent Communion.

What the great spiritual writers tell us about contemplative prayer is within the reach of the interior soul if it is willing to follow the way of humility and abnegation, and if it daily grasps a little better the following verse of the Magnificat: “He hath put down the mighty from their seat, and hath exalted the humble.”

What the masters of the life of prayer tell us is not beyond attainment by the faithful soul which believes with lively faith that in baptism it received the seed of eternal life, and which feels the need of being daily more deeply penetrated by the infinite value of the Mass. Then the soul understands how important it is to receive from God all that, in His infinite mercy, He wishes to give souls that He may draw them to Himself and make them share eternally in His inner life, in His eternal beatitude, as the prologue of St. John’s Gospel, read daily at Mass, reminds us: “But as many as received Him, He gave them power to be made the sons of God.” Those who are “born of God,” and not only of the flesh and of the will of man, should live especially by the divine life which, once begun in us, ought not to end. This is why Christ Himself says to us: “If any man thirst, let him come to Me, and drink.... Out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water,”¹⁹²¹ “a fountain of water, springing up into life everlasting.”¹⁹²²

Questions Relative to Infused Contemplation

Since we have discussed¹⁹²³ docility to the Holy Ghost, the mysticism of *The Imitation*, which is accessible to all, contemplative prayer in its beginnings and its degrees in proficient, we are prepared to examine the principal problem confronting us today about infused contemplation and to see the points on which there is agreement among many theologians who follow at the same time the principles formulated by St. Thomas and the doctrine of St. John of the Cross.

THE PRINCIPAL PROBLEM

The principal question we are going to examine bears on the intimate nature of infused contemplation. There is agreement in saying that contemplation in general, such as may exist in a philosopher, for example, in Plato and Aristotle, is a simple, intellectual view of the truth, superior to reasoning, as St. Thomas explains.¹⁹²⁴

An example of this contemplation is the knowledge that at the summit of changing beings there exists being itself, absolutely simple and immutable, principle and end of all things; it is wisdom itself, goodness, and love. All the proofs for the existence of God converge toward this culminating point, and reason by its powers alone, with the natural help of God, can rise to this philosophical contemplation.

But when it is a question of Christian contemplation based on divine revelation received through faith, what do the great spiritual writers understand by the word “contemplation,” especially when they distinguish it from “meditation”? Does Christian meditation also bear on the truths of faith and what flows from them? How does contemplation differ from it?

The great spiritual writers, who are authoritative in the matter agree in saying with St. John of the Cross: “Contemplation is the science of love, which is an infused loving knowledge of God,”¹⁹²⁵ a knowledge that is not always absorbing, that is sometimes accompanied by distractions, and that may exist with the aridity of the passive purifications, or nights of the senses and spirit.

We have shown elsewhere¹⁹²⁶ that St. Teresa,¹⁹²⁷ St. Francis de Sales¹⁹²⁸, and St. Jane de Chantal¹⁹²⁹ agree perfectly on this point with St. John of the Cross when they indicate the differences between discursive and affective meditation which becomes increasingly simple and contemplation properly so called. They also agree in stating, in opposition to the quietists, that one must not leave meditation before receiving this infused and loving knowledge of God, for in so doing there would result “more harm than good,” as St. Teresa points out.¹⁹³⁰

Since such is indeed the meaning of the word “contemplation” in the writings of the great spiritual authors, what must be understood by “acquired contemplation,” spoken of by a number of authors, specially since the seventeenth century? Is acquired contemplation, with the union with God which results from it, the summit of the normal development of the interior life, or is it in reality only a disposition to receive the grace of the infused contemplation of the mysteries of faith, which would consequently be in the normal way of sanctity and clearly distinguished from essentially extraordinary graces like revelations, visions, the stigmata, and so on? In substance this is the chief problem confronting us on this subject. To solve it, we must examine more closely the definitions that are generally admitted.

ACCEPTED DEFINITIONS

Contemplation in general, we have said, is a simple, intellectual view of the truth, above reasoning and accompanied by admiration.

Acquired contemplation is generally defined by those who admit its existence at the end of meditation as a simple and loving knowledge of God and of His works, which is the fruit of our personal activity aided by grace. It is commonly agreed that the theologian possesses the contemplation called “acquired” at the end of his research in the synthetic view which he reaches. This is also the case with the preacher who sees his whole sermon in one central thought, and in the faithful who listen attentively to this sermon, admire its unity and, as a result, taste the great truth of faith which they see in its radiation.

In these cases there is a certain contemplation that proceeds from faith united to charity and from a more or less latent influence of the gifts of understanding, wisdom, and knowledge. But this admiring knowledge would not exist if, for lack of a higher inspiration, the human activity of the preacher had not carefully arranged the ideas in such a way as to bring out their harmony. A poorly prepared sermon would, in fact, produce the contrary result.

In the believer who himself meditates on a great truth of faith, does the knowledge, which has often since the seventeenth

century been called “acquired contemplation,” differ from simplified affective meditation? In agreement with the testimony of the great spiritual writers quoted at the beginning of this chapter, especially of St. John of the Cross, St. Teresa, and St. Francis de Sales, we do not think so. It seems certain that, if their teaching is accepted, what has often been described under the name of acquired contemplation is only a variety of affective prayer, in which the soul that has not yet received the grace of loving infused knowledge, may, nevertheless, dwell for brief moments with a simple, admiring gaze on the merciful goodness of God, the interventions of Providence, the infinite value of our Savior’s merits. Subsequently the soul returns to considerations and affections.

What has been called “acquired contemplation” thus corresponds to the acquired prayer of recollection, described by St. Teresa in *The Way of Perfection*,¹⁹³¹ a prayer that is entirely different from the “supernatural and passive recollection” of which she speaks in chapter three of the fourth mansion, where infused contemplation begins. St. John of the Cross speaks in like manner in *The Ascent of Mount Carmel*, where he deals with the passage from meditation to the state where “God now communicates Himself to the soul, thus passive, as the light of the sun to him whose eyes are open.”¹⁹³²

In contradistinction to acquired prayer, infused contemplation is generally defined as a simple and loving knowledge of God and His works, which is the fruit, not of human activity aided by grace, but of a special inspiration of the Holy Ghost. For example, in a poorly organized, lifeless sermon, which produces scarcely anything but weariness in most of the listeners, the preacher may, however, quote a saying of our Lord which profoundly seizes a soul, captivates it, and absorbs it. In this case there is in that soul a manifest act of infused contemplation, because it is not in human power to produce this act at will like an ordinary act of faith. Here it is a question of a particular, penetrating, and often even sweet act of faith in which an experienced director quickly perceives an influence of the gifts of understanding and wisdom.

But, although such an act is not in our power, we can dispose ourselves by humility, prayer, and recollection, to receive the divine inspiration which produces it, and we can also follow this inspiration with docility. According to St. Thomas, a special operating grace leads us to act above discursive deliberation, whereas cooperating grace inclines us to act at the end of this deliberation.¹⁹³³

Thus the act of infused love is free and meritorious because of the docility to the Holy Ghost which it contains, although it is not properly speaking deliberate, in the sense that it is not the fruit of a reasoned deliberation but of a superior inspiration.

This essentially infused contemplation and the infused love that accompanies it begin with what St. Teresa calls the prayer of passive recollection,¹⁹³⁴ and what St. John of the Cross calls the passive night of the senses; in other words, at the beginning of the mystical life, properly so called. Whence it follows that essentially mystical contemplation is that which, in the eyes of an experienced director and in the sense we have just indicated, is manifestly passive. If this infused contemplation lasts and becomes frequent, one has the mystical state.

We believe, therefore, that we may draw the same conclusion in regard to so-called acquired contemplation as we did in a previous work:¹⁹³⁵ If by acquired contemplation we mean a prayer distinct from simplified affective prayer, in which the intellect is totally absorbed by its object and in which we place ourselves by the suppression of all rational activity, we thereby not only create a degree of prayer unknown to St. Teresa and St. John of the Cross, but we likewise oppose their explicit teaching. In fact, St. Teresa repeatedly opposes the total suppression of discourse and the movement of thought as long as one has not received infused contemplation.¹⁹³⁶

Therefore the majority of theologians who, like those of Carmel, while wishing to remain faithful to the teaching of St. John of the Cross and of St. Teresa, have spoken of acquired contemplation, understand by it what St. Teresa calls “the acquired prayer of recollection”¹⁹³⁷ in which our intellectual activity is simplified, but not suppressed. These theologians call this prayer contemplation because the act of simple intellectual intuition is frequent in it, and discursive meditation, on the other hand, is reduced. Consequently the substance of the difficulty disappears, and the question becomes one of terminology.¹⁹³⁸

Moreover, the Carmelite theologians who have admitted the existence of acquired contemplation have rightly refused to consider it the normal term of spiritual progress on earth. They hold that in generous souls truly docile to the Holy Ghost, it is a proximate disposition to receive infused contemplation normally.¹⁹³⁹

Different opinions have arisen about the time when infused contemplation begins. Attentive reading of the third chapter of St. Teresa’s fourth mansion, however, seems to indicate clearly that contemplation begins with the prayer of “supernatural recollection,” which we cannot obtain for ourselves by our own activity, aided by grace. According to the terminology employed by St. John of the Cross, contemplation begins with the passive night of the senses.¹⁹⁴⁰

The terminology may thus be fixed by the meaning which the great spiritual writers have given to the unqualified term “contemplation”; when they juxtapose it to meditation, they are speaking of infused contemplation which begins in the aridity of the night of the senses.¹⁹⁴¹ For this reason St. John of the Cross, as we said at the beginning of this chapter, defined contemplation as “an infused loving knowledge of God.”¹⁹⁴²

According to the masters whom we have just quoted, contemplation properly so called, or infused, is therefore a loving knowledge of God which comes from a special inspiration of the Holy Ghost to make us advance continually in the love of God. Not only does it proceed from the infused virtues, in particular from faith united to charity, but it is an infused act of knowledge accompanied by infused love, which we could not make by ourselves with the help of common actual grace. In certain souls it is love which dominates; in others, light.

This special inspiration of the Holy Ghost is, therefore, the principle of infused contemplation. We receive this inspiration with docility through the gifts of the Holy Ghost, especially through those of understanding and wisdom, which are, as a result, in the just soul like sails which enable a vessel to receive as it should the impulsion of a favorable breeze.¹⁹⁴³

St. John of the Cross himself links infused contemplation to the gifts of the Holy Ghost when he writes in *The Dark Night*: "This dark contemplation is called secret, because it is, as I have said before, the mystical theology which theologians call secret wisdom, and which, according to St. Thomas, is infused into the soul more especially by love. This happens in a secret, hidden way in which the natural operations of the understanding and the other faculties have no share. And, therefore, because the faculties of the soul cannot compass it, it being the Holy Ghost who infuses it into the soul, in a way it knoweth not, as the Bride saith in the Canticle, we call it secret."¹⁹⁴⁴ Under this higher inspiration, living faith thus becomes increasingly penetrating and sweet.

Therefore, between infused contemplation and meditation, even when simplified, there is a difference not only of degree, but of nature. Meditation, in fact, is in our power; it proceeds from our personal activity aided by common actual grace and, if there is in it a latent influence of the gifts of the Holy Ghost, this influence is not what constitutes it. Analogically, when the work of the rowers is facilitated by a favorable breeze, it is not the breeze which is the principle of the toil.

Infused contemplation, on the contrary, is not in our power; it proceeds not from our activity aided by grace, but from the more or less manifest special inspiration of the Holy Ghost, which is indispensable here. Therefore, in this case, the difference is not one of degree, but of nature, for the special inspiration is not only a stronger actual grace; it is not only moving but regulating; it contains a superior rule. Similarly, there is a specific difference between even the infused virtues and the gifts of the Holy Ghost: the infused virtues are by themselves principles of acts which we can produce at will, whereas the gifts dispose us to receive with docility the impulsion of the Holy Ghost for acts whose superhuman mode, springing from a superior rule, specifically surpasses our activity aided by common grace. As St. Thomas shows,¹⁹⁴⁵ there is in this case a specific difference, just as there is more than a difference of degree between the work of the oars that makes a boat advance and the impulsion of a favorable wind that makes rowing unnecessary.¹⁹⁴⁶

In the ascetical life, before the passive purification of the senses, in which infused contemplation begins, the gifts of the Holy Ghost still intervene only weakly, and often they are as if bound by some attachment to venial sin,¹⁹⁴⁷ like sails which have not yet been spread. Later, in the mystical life, the intellectual gifts of understanding and wisdom, which are both speculative and practical,¹⁹⁴⁸ appear in some under a clearly contemplative form and in others, as in St. Vincent de Paul, under a form more directed toward action.

Lastly, it should be noted that the act of infused contemplation proceeds from living faith as from its radical principle, and from the gift of wisdom or that of understanding as from its proximate principle actualized by the divine inspiration. It is an act of penetrating and sweet faith; the superior inspiration received through the gifts adds to this act of faith the precious modalities of penetration and sweetness, which increase with the touch of the Holy Ghost to the point of becoming a taste of eternal life. Here we find, therefore, in a subordinated manner the formal motive of infused faith (the authority of God revealing), that of charity (the divine goodness sovereignly lovable for its own sake), and that of the gifts mentioned (the illumination of the Holy Ghost, which is regulating and inspiring). Consequently this simple act of penetrating and sweet faith deserves to be called infused in order to distinguish it from the act of faith which we commonly make at will, without special inspiration, for example, in order to say the prayers that we recite daily.

What is meant by the direct acts of contemplation? They are acts which are in no way discursive, but which are made by a simple gaze, above reasoning. And indeed they are at times so peaceful that the soul does not, so to speak, perceive them; in that case they are the contrary of reflective or perceived acts. With this meaning, according to Cassian,¹⁹⁴⁹ St. Anthony said: "There is no perfect prayer if the solitary perceives that he is praying." This is the learned ignorance of which the mystics often speak. The direct acts of true contemplation do not indicate a dangerous idleness, but, on the contrary, a most intimate knowledge of divine truth. And if, after such prayer, the soul is humble, peaceful, detached, and zealous for the practice of the virtues, this result is a sign that it has not lost its time in prayer. These direct acts of contemplation are free, although they are not the fruit of discursive deliberation.

THE PROGRESS OF INFUSED CONTEMPLATION

We have pointed out that, to show the growing intensity of contemplation and union with God, St. Teresa insists on the

progressive extension of the mystical state to the different faculties, which gradually are either suspended or captivated by God. First of all, the will alone is seized and held (in the prayer of quiet), then the intellect (in more or less complete simple union); next the imagination falls asleep, so to speak; lastly, in total or partial ecstasy, the exercise of the exterior senses is suspended because all the activity of the soul is drawn toward God. St. Teresa knows, however, that the suspension of the imagination and of the senses is only a concomitant and accidental phenomenon of infused contemplation,¹⁹⁵⁰ since, she says, ecstasy generally ceases in the most perfect mystical state, the transforming union.¹⁹⁵¹ The mystical state, complete in regard to its extension, is not therefore necessarily the most intense or the most elevated. St. Teresa is well aware of this fact; but this extension, which is at first progressive, then restricted, is easy to determine and describe. It constitutes a sign which may be useful, on condition that it be joined to another more profound sign on which St. John of the Cross insists.

This more profound sign refers directly to the progress of contemplation in penetration and to the intimacy of divine union. It is found, first of all, in the passive purification of the senses, then in that of the spirit, both of which denote great progress in the intensity of the knowledge and love of God and of the other virtues. St. Teresa did not indeed neglect this second sign; she speaks of it in connection with the aridities that contemplatives undergo, especially of the great aridity that is found at the beginning of the sixth mansion, and that corresponds to the night of the spirit. She also speaks of it in connection with the different ways of watering a garden:¹⁹⁵² water drawn from the well by hand is the figure of meditation; the water-wheel, called a noria, is the symbol of the prayer of quiet; irrigation by canals, which fertilizes the garden, represents the sleep of the powers; finally, rain symbolizes the prayer of union. Thus progressively the flowers of the virtues bloom and form the fruits: “This is the time of resolutions, of heroic determinations, of the living energy of good desires, of the beginning of hatred of the world, and of the most clear perception of its vanity.”¹⁹⁵³

Infused contemplation begins therefore, as St. John of the Cross says,¹⁹⁵⁴ with the passive purification of the senses, which is a second conversion in arid quiet; it progresses then, accompanied by the consolations of the illuminative way. Contemplation becomes much more penetrating in the night of the spirit, in the midst of great spiritual aridity and of strong temptations against the theological virtues. In this period these virtues and humility are purified of all alloy and become truly heroic.¹⁹⁵⁵ The soul is thus prepared for the transforming union which St. John of the Cross speaks of in *The Living Flame of Love* and St. Teresa in the seventh mansion. The transforming union is the culminating point of infused contemplation on earth and, in souls that reach the full perfection of Christian life, it is the normal prelude of eternal life.

WHAT INFUSED CONTEMPLATION DOES NOT NECESSARILY REQUIRE

Several important observations arise from the facts we have just presented.

1. The degrees of contemplation described by St. John of the Cross and St. Teresa, show that contemplation does not always imply joy, that it begins ordinarily in the aridity of the sensibility, as it may subsist in great aridity of the spirit. Moreover, it is not necessarily accompanied by an absolute impossibility to discourse or to reason. Undoubtedly contemplation is superior to discourse, but precisely for this reason contemplation may inspire it from above, for example, in a preacher whose sermon would spring from the plenitude of the infused contemplation of the mysteries of Christ, like St. Peter’s sermons on Pentecost and the pages which St. Augustine certainly wrote under a superior inspiration.

2. It follows also from what precedes that the mystical state gives at times the feeling of the presence of God (it is the quasi-experimental knowledge springing from the gift of wisdom); at others a great thirst for God, with intense suffering because of inability to enjoy Him and a lively feeling of moral and spiritual separation from Him (this is what happens especially in the night of the spirit, when the penetration of the gift of understanding makes itself felt more than the sweetness of the gift of wisdom).

In this last state there is, besides, an infused knowledge and an infused love, from which comes sharp suffering because God is not loved as He should be. This lively suffering and great thirst for God cannot, moreover, exist without a profound influence of His grace in us. Consequently there is a painful presence of God.

3. In addition, from what we have just said it is clear that infused contemplation does not require infused ideas like those of the angels,¹⁹⁵⁶ but only an infused light: the special illumination of the gifts of understanding and wisdom, which is clearly distinguished from graces *gratis datae* like prophecy, the gift of the discerning of spirits, or that of tongues, graces bestowed especially for the benefit of one’s neighbor.¹⁹⁵⁷

4. Lastly, the description of the degrees of infused contemplation given by St. John of the Cross shows that it is not an immediate perception of God as He is in Himself; such a perception is proper only to the beatific vision.¹⁹⁵⁸ When there is a marked influence of the gift of wisdom, God is known without reasoning as present in us in His effects (medium in quo),

especially in the filial affection for Himself which He inspires in us, and in the sweetness of love which He sometimes makes a soul that is closely united to Him experience. This is the teaching of St. Thomas in his commentary on verse sixteen of chapter eight of the Epistle to the Romans when he discusses the words, “The Spirit Himself giveth testimony to our spirit, that we are the sons of God.”¹⁹⁵⁹ It is impossible to admit here an immediate intuition of sanctifying grace itself.¹⁹⁶⁰

5. Therefore the mystical life is characterized by the predominance (become both frequent and manifest for an experienced director) of the superhuman mode of the gifts of the Holy Ghost, especially of the gift of wisdom, which illumines the others. However, in the passive night of the senses the gift of knowledge predominates, showing the vanity of created things; in the night of the spirit the soul experiences chiefly the deep penetration of the gift of understanding, but without experiencing the sweetness of the gift of wisdom. This gift appears in its full development and its greatest influence in the transforming union. The mystical state in general must not be confounded with its consoling phases, or with its complete flowering; it often exists under the form of arid quiet, which St. Jane de Chantal experienced for so long a time.¹⁹⁶¹

THE CALL TO CONTEMPLATION

The call to contemplation may be understood in different ways. When the question is raised whether all interior souls are called to infused contemplation, the call in question is general and remote, distinct from the individual and proximate call. The latter call, moreover, may be only sufficient and followed by resistance or negligence, or it may be efficacious, and that in two ways: to lead souls actually either to the lower degrees or to the higher degrees of contemplation.¹⁹⁶² In this problem we are again confronted with the mystery of the efficacy of grace, which is understood in one way by Thomists and Augustinians, and in another by Molinists.

In response to the question whether all interior souls are called to contemplation in a general and remote manner, we believe that the reply must be in the affirmative according to the principles formulated by St. Thomas on the gifts of the Holy Ghost which are received by all the just, and by St. John of the Cross on the passive purifications necessary for full Christian perfection, toward which we should all tend.

Three principal reasons motivate this reply. They relate to the radical principle of the interior life, to its progress, and to its end.

1. The basic principle of the mystical life (characterized by infused contemplation) is the same as that of the common interior life: the grace of the virtues and the gifts. Now docility to the Holy Ghost, according to the superhuman mode of the gifts, should normally prevail with spiritual progress to remedy the always imperfect human mode of the virtues and of our personal activity aided by common grace. The mystical life, which is characterized by this docility and this superhuman mode of knowledge and of infused love, appears, therefore, normally first of all in the illuminative way, but especially in the unitive way. Consequently St. John of the Cross writes: “The soul began to set out on the way of the spirit, the way of proficients, which is also called the illuminative way, or the way of infused contemplation, wherein God Himself teaches and refreshes the soul without meditation or any active efforts that itself may deliberately make.”¹⁹⁶³ This text, as we have already pointed out, is one of the most important.

2. In the progress of the interior life, the purification of the soul, according to St. John of the Cross, who is the faithful echo of tradition, is not complete except by the passive purifications. These purifications belong to the mystical order, in the sense that infused contemplation begins with the passive purification of the senses, in which the illuminations of the gift of knowledge predominate, and rises with the night of the spirit, in which the gift of understanding assumes the principal role. The Holy Ghost thus purifies humility and the theological virtues from all alloy; He brings into powerful relief their essentially supernatural and uncreated formal motive: the first revealing Truth, Mercy and helpful Omnipotence, divine Goodness, sovereignly lovable for its own sake.¹⁹⁶⁴ These passive purifications of a mystical order are thus in the normal way of sanctity and dispense from purgatory those who undergo them generously; they are a purgatory before death in which the soul merits and makes progress, whereas in the other purgatory the soul no longer merits.

3. The end of the interior life is the same as that of the mystical life: eternal life, or the beatific vision and the inamissible love resulting from it. But the mystical life disposes the soul more immediately to this last end and, in the perfect, is its prelude, as shown by the evangelical beatitudes, which are eminent acts of the virtues and the gifts. The mystical life, which is characterized by infused contemplation and infused love of the divine goodness, is thus seen to be in the normal way of sanctity.

The reasons we have adduced—the basic principle of the interior life, its progress by the necessary passive purifications, and the ultimate end to which it is ordained—all contribute to show, in short, that infused contemplation and the union with

God resulting from it are, in the perfect, the normal prelude of the life of heaven.

The principles formulated by St. Thomas on the gifts of the Holy Ghost, received by all the just, and the doctrine of St. John of the Cross on the passive purifications thus lead us to admit the general and remote call of all interior souls to infused contemplation.¹⁹⁶⁵

The reservations made here and there by St. Teresa, St. John of the Cross, Tauler, and other masters, refer to the individual and proximate call.¹⁹⁶⁶ It is certain that all just souls are not called in an individual and proximate manner to infused contemplation.

The proof of this statement lies in the fact that the three principal signs of the proximate call are not in all the just, or even in all interior souls. St. John of the Cross points out these signs in *The Dark Night*: “(1) When we find no comfort in the things of God (known by way of the senses), and none also in created things.... (2) The second test and condition of this purgation are that the memory dwells ordinarily upon God with a painful anxiety and carefulness; the soul thinks it is not serving God, but going backwards.... (3) The third sign... is inability to meditate and make reflections, and to excite the imagination, as before, notwithstanding all the efforts we may make; for God begins now to communicate Himself no longer through the channel of sense, as formerly... but in pure spirit,... in the act of pure contemplation.”¹⁹⁶⁷

Finally, the individual and proximate call may be sufficient but remain fruitless because of our negligence or, on the contrary, it is efficacious, and that in different ways: to lead us effectively either to the lower degrees of contemplation, or to the highest degrees. Consequently St. Teresa applies to this subject our Lord’s words: “Many are called, but few chosen.”¹⁹⁶⁸

Our discussion of the call to contemplation shows that all interior souls may legitimately desire infused contemplation, on condition that they remain humble and leave to the good pleasure of God the time when this grace shall be granted to them. Thus the farmer may legitimately desire and ask for rain that will render fruitful the earth he has sown, but he should also trust in Providence. If every prayer should be at once humble, trusting, and persevering, the same qualities should characterize that prayer by which we ask for the penetrating and sweet faith of which we have just spoken, that is, a more lively and profound knowledge of revealed mysteries, of the majesty of God, of His radiating goodness, His providence, an experiential knowledge of the redemptive Incarnation, of the Passion, of the humiliations of the Word made flesh, of the influence that He still exercises through the Eucharist, of the infinite value of the Mass, of the worth of a fervent Communion, of the value of time which leads us to eternity. Holy Scripture often repeats this prayer: for example, in the Book of Wisdom we read, as the Office for the feast of St. Teresa recalls: “Wherefore I wished, and understanding was given me: and I called upon God, and the spirit of wisdom came upon me. And I preferred her before kingdoms and thrones, and esteemed riches nothing in comparison of her....

For all gold in comparison of her, is as a little sand, and silver in respect to her shall be counted as clay. I loved her above health and beauty, and chose to have her instead of light: for her light cannot be put out. Now all good things came to me together with her.... I knew not that she was the mother of them all.... For she is an infinite treasure to men, which they that use, become the friends of God.”¹⁹⁶⁹ This passage clearly expresses the desire for the lights of the gift of wisdom. Therefore we understand why the Carmelite theologians, Philip of the Blessed Trinity,¹⁹⁷⁰ Anthony of the Holy Ghost, and the Dominican Vallgornera, in the passages where they speak of the desire for infused contemplation, say: “All ought to aspire to supernatural contemplation.” Joseph of the Holy Ghost speaks in like terms: “We may all aspire to it, ardently desire it, and humbly ask it of God.”¹⁹⁷¹

THE DIRECTION OF SOULS IN RELATION TO CONTEMPLATION

Before any sign of an immediate call to contemplation, it is certainly advisable to point out to souls the grandeur of the spirit of faith, which inclines one to consider all things from God’s point of view: the mysteries of religion, Christian worship, persons, whether pleasing to us or not, pleasurable or painful events. Only with the grace of contemplation is this lofty and supernatural consideration of all things perfect and lasting. Thus contemplation may be spoken of discreetly, without being named.

All souls can certainly be led to desire a sweet and penetrating faith in the great mysteries of salvation, and it is fitting that they ask for it. In the same way, before the signs of predestination appear in a soul, it is made to desire eternal life. Hence it may with propriety desire everything that is in the normal way of eternal life.

We must, however, distinguish clearly here between intention and realization. In the intention, the end that is glimpsed and desired comes first, then the means. In the realization, the inverse is true; the soul must rise from the most modest means to higher ones. Here rash haste should be avoided, for it would lead to neglect of the intermediate steps; to do so would compromise everything. It would be like wishing to construct the roof of a building before laying the foundations, or to fly before having wings.

Souls should also be continually reminded of the ordinary conditions of true union with God: habitual recollection, complete renunciation, purity of heart, true humility, perseverance in prayer despite prolonged aridity, great fraternal charity. If to these conditions is joined love of the liturgy and of sacred doctrine, the soul truly prepares itself for the proximate call to the divine

intimacy.

When the proximate call becomes manifest, souls should read the description given by St. John of the Cross¹⁹⁷² of the three signs of this call, or some other spiritual work offering the same doctrine. Such reading will keep them from being discouraged by the troubles and aridity of the night of the senses. Once the graces of contemplation have become frequent, the reading of the same works should be continued. This is especially true of those works that put the soul on guard against the desire for essentially extraordinary graces, that is, visions, revelations, and the stigmata.

As soon as these souls are less faithful, they should be told of the defects of proficient, of the love of the cross, of the necessity of a more profound purification of the spirit, which is the indispensable condition for close union with God and for the full perfection of Christian life.

Many contemporary theologians—Benedictines, Carmelites, Dominicans, Jesuits, and others—admit this doctrine in substance, as shown by an inquiry which appeared in *La Vie spirituelle*.¹⁹⁷³ We agree with Father Marechal, S.J., when he says: “Contemplative activity should, even in its higher degrees..., mark a relatively rare but normal development of the common life of grace.... [This doctrine] echoes the most authentic tradition and now meets with scarcely any opposition.”¹⁹⁷⁴

We see why Alvarez de Paz, S.J., wrote: “We should blame ourselves if we never taste the ineffable sweetness of contemplation.”¹⁹⁷⁵ And it is well known that St. Francis de Sales concludes: “Holy contemplation is the end and the goal toward which all spiritual exercises tend.”¹⁹⁷⁶

To avoid the imprudences, the rash haste of those who might use this teaching as an authorization to neglect the intermediate steps, one should often recall, as we have just said, the conditions ordinarily required to receive the grace of the contemplation of the mysteries of faith: purity and humility of heart, simplicity of spirit, habitual recollection, and complete renunciation.

This traditional doctrine is briefly summed up in the lines we have already quoted from *The Imitation*: “There are found so few contemplative persons, because there are few that know how to withdraw themselves entirely from perishable creatures.”¹⁹⁷⁷ Contemplation is “the hidden manna”¹⁹⁷⁸ given by God to generous souls as the normal prelude of the beatific vision.¹⁹⁷⁹

The New Elements in Infused Prayer

Some declare that the explanation often given of infused prayer, which attributes it to a special inspiration received with docility through the gifts of the Holy Ghost, is insufficient. According to them, this explanation does not sufficiently account for what is new in infused prayer and shows that it differs only in degree from acquired prayer, in which the gifts of the Holy Ghost have begun to intervene in a latent manner.¹⁹⁸⁰

To explain this matter we shall examine two points: first, whether the character of newness always clearly appears in the transition from acquired to infused prayer; next, whether this transition is to be explained by the inspiration and special illumination of the gifts of the Holy Ghost.

WHETHER THE CHARACTER OF NEWNESS ALWAYS APPEARS CLEARLY

The character of newness is incontestably clear if a soul passes suddenly from more or less simplified discursive meditation (occasionally called, in its last phase, acquired contemplation) not to arid but to consoled quiet, which St. Teresa speaks of in the second chapter of the fourth mansion. In this infused prayer “the will is captivated” by the interior illumination that shows it the goodness of God present in it as a source of living water: “This joy is not, like earthly happiness, at once felt by the heart; after gradually filling it to the brim, the delight overflows throughout all the mansions and faculties.... They [the celestial waters] appear to dilate and enlarge us internally, and benefit us in an inexplicable manner, nor does even the soul itself understand what it receives.”¹⁹⁸¹

However, the saint says in the same chapter, it happens that in this state the understanding and imagination do not cease to be disturbed and to trouble the will.¹⁹⁸² The character of newness of infused prayer would, therefore, be still more sensible if the understanding itself were captivated and if the imagination and memory ceased to be disturbed, as happens in the prayer of union,¹⁹⁸³ which is compared to rain which falls from heaven, and no longer only to the water wheel (noria) which draws water from a well.¹⁹⁸⁴

But more often it happens that the transition from the last acquired prayer to initial infused prayer is not so clearly distinguished. St. John of the Cross shows this in *The Dark Night*, where he describes the night of the senses, which is recognized by the three signs often cited: “The first is this: when we find no comfort in the things of God (proposed in a sensible way by the intermediary of the senses and the imagination, as in meditation).... The second test and condition of this purgation are that the memory dwells ordinarily upon God with a painful anxiety and carefulness; the soul thinks it is not serving God, but going backwards.... The third sign... is inability to meditate and make reflections, and to excite the imagination as before, notwithstanding all the efforts we may make; for God begins now to communicate Himself, no longer through the channel of sense, as formerly, in consecutive reflections, by which we arranged and divided our knowledge, but in pure spirit, which admits not of successive reflections, and in the act of pure contemplation.”¹⁹⁸⁵

This prayer is initial infused contemplation, accompanied by persistent sensible aridity; consequently this state has often been called arid quiet. St. Jane de Chantal¹⁹⁸⁶ often spoke of this prayer, which differs appreciably from the consoled quiet, described by St. Teresa in the second chapter of the fourth mansion. In the description given by St. John of the Cross, the character of newness of initial infused contemplation is not very striking. The same is true of the description contained in Bossuet’s well known little work, *Maniere facile et courte de faire l’oraison en foi*.

The first phase of this prayer is acquired, the second is patently infused.¹⁹⁸⁷ Hence we can see why this prayer is spoken of as a mixed prayer, in which the influence of the special inspiration of the Holy Ghost, which is at first latent, begins to make itself felt.¹⁹⁸⁸

The great spiritual writers have even pointed out several times that certain very generous interior souls often have infused contemplation without realizing it, since contemplation may exist in the great obscurities of the night of the senses and of that of the spirit.

The passage from acquired to infused prayer is not, therefore always stamped with a marked character of newness; and, even when this new character is quite manifest, it is not the same in arid quiet and in consoled quiet.

THE EXPLANATION OF THIS TRANSITION

When the transition from acquired to infused prayer is slow, progressive, as St. John of the Cross describes it in the night of the

senses, the special inspiration passively received through the gifts of the Holy Ghost sufficiently explains the new character that presents itself here.

But to understand it thus, we must see clearly the specific difference between the human mode in which even the infused virtues operate and the superhuman mode of operation of the gifts of the Holy Ghost, the acts of which have precisely as their immediate rule the illumination and special inspiration of the interior Master. This inspiration is an elevated form of actual operating grace, which moves us to act freely above all discursive deliberation. It is thus notably superior to common actual grace, called cooperating grace, which moves us according to discursive deliberation to place a given act of faith, hope, charity, prudence, justice, or of some other virtue. St. Thomas stressed this difference profoundly in two articles which we have often explained: “Do the gifts differ [specifically] from the infused virtues by their object and their formal motive?”¹⁹⁸⁹ “How does operating grace differ from cooperating grace?”¹⁹⁹⁰

The difference is manifest: For example, I see that the customary hour to say my Office has come; I move myself then (aided by common actual grace, which in this case is cooperating) to perform the acts of faith and religion proper to the recitation of this prayer.

On the contrary, in the midst of a difficult, absorbing study, I suddenly receive, without expecting it, a special inspiration to pray, either for a better comprehension of what I am reading or for a friend who must need prayers at that moment. In the first case, Christian prudence inclines me to say the Divine Office and to perform the acts of faith and religion that this liturgical prayer demands; in the second, the special inspiration of the Holy Ghost, which is above prudential deliberation, inclines me to pray.

There is certainly a new element here, although the transition from one mode to the other may at times be slow and progressive, and at others more rapid and even instantaneous.

When the transition is rapid—for example, if a soul passes without intermediary from simplified discursive meditation to the consoled quiet which is described by St. Teresa—why would not the inspiration and special illumination received through the gifts of the Holy Ghost suffice to explain it?

At this point in our study, it is important that we consider the gifts not only in a general, schematic, and bookish manner, but also in particular, in a concrete and living manner, as St. Thomas and the great spiritual writers, such as St. Bonaventure, Ruysbroeck, Tauler, and Father Lallemant, have described them.

The gift of knowledge explains the experimental knowledge of the emptiness of created things in contrast to divine things; in particular, such a knowledge of the gravity of mortal sin as an offense against God, that one has a horror of sin. This knowledge and horror have been remarked in certain converts at the moment of their conversion. The simple, attentive reading of books of piety, joined to the examination of conscience, could never have given them this lively contrition, which manifests a special inspiration of the Holy Ghost. In this case there is certainly a new element.

Likewise the gift of piety, which is in the will, explains why this faculty is captivated in the prayer of quiet by the sweet presence of God, experientially known, as St. Thomas says in his commentary on the Epistle to the Romans: “You have received the spirit of adoption of sons, whereby we cry: Abba (Father). For the Spirit Himself giveth testimony to our spirit, that we are the sons of God.”¹⁹⁹¹ St. Thomas remarks in the same passage that the Holy Ghost gives this testimony by the filial affection He inspires in us for Himself, to which we could not have moved ourselves by common actual grace. Thus the disciples of Emmaus said: “Was not our heart burning within us, whilst He spoke in the way, and opened to us the Scriptures?”¹⁹⁹² By the gift of piety, too, is explained, according to St. Thomas, what we read in the Epistle to the Romans: “The Spirit Himself asketh for us with unspeakable groanings.”¹⁹⁹³

Lastly, the gift of wisdom is, according to St. Thomas,¹⁹⁹⁴ the principle of a quasi-experiential knowledge of the presence of God in us, a knowledge based both on the special inspiration of the Holy Ghost and on the connaturalness with divine things which comes from charity. The special inspiration makes use of this connaturalness which it actualizes (infused act of love) to show us how greatly the mysteries of faith satisfy to the full our loftiest aspirations and give rise to new ones. In this case there is an act of infused love and of infused knowledge, of sweet and penetrating faith. These acts are said to be infused, not only because they proceed from infused virtues (in this case from the theological virtues), but because they would not be produced without the special inspiration to which the gifts render us docile. We could not have moved ourselves to these acts by ourselves, with common actual grace, called cooperating grace; we needed a special operating grace.¹⁹⁹⁵

REPLY TO A DIFFICULTY

It has been objected that this traditional explanation, although given by the greatest masters, shows only a difference of degree and not one of nature; therefore the really new character of infused prayer is not sufficiently explained.

To this objection we reply that there is clearly a specific difference, and not only a difference of degree, between the gifts of the Holy Ghost and the infused virtues. The rule of our acts differs according as they are performed either through or without

the special inspiration of the Holy Ghost.¹⁹⁹⁶ This is clear, for example, in regard to the inspiration of the gift of counsel which supplies for the imperfection of prudence when it is absolutely hesitant before an indiscreet question and is faced with the problem of avoiding a lie and keeping another's secret. Sometimes only the inspiration of the Holy Ghost will furnish the answer promptly. Such an inspiration will be given by the Holy Ghost to generous interior souls that are, on the whole, docile to Him.

This specific difference is manifest when a discursively deliberate act of prudence is followed by an act of the gift of counsel (above discursive deliberation), which proceeds from the special inspiration of the interior Master, in such a way that prudence, remaining hesitant, is no longer exercised at the same time. But sometimes the special inspiration is given only to facilitate prudential deliberation by reminding us, for example, of a certain expression from the Gospel; then the difference is less evident.

Similarly, a man who is steering a boat will find an appreciable difference between advancing by means of oars and advancing under the impulsion of a favorable wind; this difference is apparent when the wind becomes strong enough to dispense with rowing. In this case there is certainly more than a difference of degree. The difference is less obvious if the breeze does not dispense the rower from all effort, but only facilitates his work.

Just so, says St. Teresa, prayer may be symbolized by several different ways of watering a garden: one may draw water by hard labor from a well, or bring it up by a pump, called a noria, or irrigate the garden with water from a river, or lastly rain may water the garden.¹⁹⁹⁷ If there is a brusque transition from the first way to the fourth, the change is manifest; but the transition may be made in a progressive manner. Moreover, infused prayer also, symbolized by the rain from heaven, may be explained by the special illumination and inspiration of the Holy Ghost, received through the gifts of understanding, wisdom, and piety, when these gifts, which grow with charity, exist in a higher degree.

We have shown at length elsewhere¹⁹⁹⁸ that to explain mystical contemplation, according to St. Thomas and St. John of the Cross, it is not necessary to have recourse to infused species or ideas similar to those of the angels, that it suffices to have the infused light, called the special illumination and inspiration of the Holy Ghost, which grows continually in every generous interior soul that unites love of the cross with docility to the interior Master. Faith thus becomes increasingly penetrating and sweet.

Neither is it necessary to have recourse to prophetic light, since that of the gifts suffices. St. Thomas makes this point clear when he speaks of infused contemplation in Adam in the state of innocence and then in us. He says: "In contemplation God is seen by this means which is the light of wisdom, which lifts the spirit to perceive divine things, although the divine essence is not seen immediately; and thus, since original sin, by grace God is seen by the contemplative, although less perfectly than in the state of innocence."¹⁹⁹⁹ The light of wisdom spoken of here is the gift of wisdom which St. Thomas treats of *ex professo*, IIa IIae, q. 45. There is no reason to see in it a light specifically distinct from that which this gift disposes us to receive. Thus the new element found in infused prayer is sufficiently explained by the traditional doctrine of the special inspiration of the Holy Ghost, received through the gifts. This point is confirmed by St. Thomas' emphatically clear teaching that the grace of the virtues and the gifts, which unites us to God, is very superior to graces *gratis datae*, which only make us know the signs of the divine intervention.²⁰⁰⁰

Close union with God intimately present in us is superior to these signs, which are evidently subordinate to it. The divine reality, the hidden God, is superior to all symbols; excessive attention to these signs would, says St. John of the Cross, turn us away from infused contemplation, which attains God Himself in the obscurity of faith.

THE SPECIAL ILLUMINATION OF THE HOLY GHOST

In January, 1937, Father Lithard, C.S.Sp., sent the following statement of his exact opinion on the special illumination of the Holy Ghost to the editor of *La Vie spirituelle*.

Reverend Father:

La Vie spirituelle for November 1 published a short article on the occasion of a note which appeared under my name in the *Revue d'ascetique et de mystique*. I should like to add some precise statements to that note, and I trust that you will accept them as readily as did Father Garrigou-Lagrange when I spoke to him about the question in which I referred to him. I shall be brief.

I readily agree with Father Garrigou-Lagrange about the distinction that should be made between the helps which strengthen our personal initiative and those which manifest the divine initiative. In the first, the mode is purely human and we have no experience of it; the others, on the contrary, bear the mark of the gifts through which we receive them; they are "instinctive," and we are easily aware of them. We have experience of passivity.

But I pointed out that the helps received through the gifts do not all seem to be of the same nature, a point which Father Garrigou-Lagrange does not seem disposed to concede. Why, he says, "would special illumination not suffice" in the second

case as well as in the first? My answer is this: because the experience of the mystics seems clearly to demand another kind of illumination in infused contemplation. Whereas hitherto, under the plainly instinctive action of graces, either of prayer or of action, they have been conscious only of their own acts,—acts, moreover, which are within their capacity, abstraction being made of instinctive delight, with the sole helps conceded to their personal initiative—in infused contemplation they have, in addition, the consciousness of being in contact with God, to the extent that they speak with assurance of seeing, feeling, touching God. And, on doing so, they no longer refer only to the passivity of this specific act which is beyond all human power. For this reason we declare that these acts are doubly infused and supernatural. And it is at this point that these fortunate privileged souls speak of a distinctly new, additional experience, introducing them as it were into another world: what they knew by faith, they taste in faith. Evidently it is the gifts which serve to receive these graces, since they are by their nature, as Father Garrigou-Lagrange willingly agrees, *habitus receptivi*, and not *operativi*, as the virtues are.

Must we not, moreover, admit, beyond indistinct infused contemplation, helps of another nature for distinct infused contemplation, which requires infused species that render it extraordinary? God is rich, and therefore varied in His gifts.

But I quite willingly admit with Father Garrigou-Lagrange that the transitions are divinely gentle, at first scarcely perceptible insinuations, whose nature is shrouded in distant mystery and reveals itself only progressively. Is this not true in all God's works? If it is hard to say where one color ends and another begins in the work of nature, must we be astonished at our ignorance in the work of grace?

THE SPECIAL ILLUMINATION OF THE GIFT OF WISDOM SUFFICIENT FOR INFUSED CONTEMPLATION

In the preceding pages we have already answered the questions asked in Father Lithard's letter. To complete the subject we shall add the following observations.

1. To explain the new element in infused contemplation, we must recall the specific difference between the gifts of the Holy Ghost and the Christian virtues; emphasizing the fact that the gifts dispose us to receive the special inspiration of the Holy Ghost which moves us, above discursive deliberation, to infused acts to which we could not have moved ourselves deliberately by the virtues alone with the help of actual cooperating grace. Thus, we said, there is a notable difference, and more than a difference of degree, in the progress of a boat by dint of rowing or under the impulse of a favorable wind, although at times the breeze favors the work of the rowers without rendering it useless. Similarly, the gifts are exercised in a latent manner in the ascetical life, and at times in a manifest but rare manner; when their influence becomes at once frequent and manifest to an experienced director, then the mystical life begins. This life is quite easily discerned by the three signs which St. John of the Cross gives of the passive purification of the senses, in which, he says, infused contemplation begins.²⁰⁰¹

We also pointed out that the new character of infused contemplation appears more clearly when one passes from discursive meditation (symbolized, for example, by the *noria*) to consoled quiet;²⁰⁰² whereas this new character stands out less clearly when one passes, as ordinarily happens, from discursive meditation to the arid quiet of the passive night of the senses.

2. We admit a great variety in the gifts, since each has its distinct specification. For example, among the intellectual gifts, that of counsel, which is of a purely practical order, supplies for the imperfections of even infused prudence; the gift of knowledge, which is often exercised in the aridity of the night of the senses, shows us either the nothingness of creatures and the gravity of sin, or the symbolism of sensible things in relation to divine things. The gift of understanding gives us a special penetration of the truths of faith as happens particularly in the night of the spirit in spite of the great spiritual aridity found therein. Lastly, the gift of wisdom gives us a quasi-experiential knowledge of the presence of God in us by the wholly filial affection, by the infused love, which God inspires in us for Himself.²⁰⁰³

3. We have also often pointed out that in certain mystical souls the intellectual gifts, even that of wisdom, do not intervene under the form of a brilliant light, as in the great contemplatives, but under the form of a diffused light which is, nevertheless, very precious, for it illumines all things from above, in particular one's conduct and the good to be done to souls. This is the case, for example, in the entire apostolic life of St. Vincent de Paul.

4. What we do not admit is that one and the same *habitus*, like that of the gift of wisdom, is ordained to acts of a different nature in such a way that the ordinary mode of the first would not be ordained to the extraordinary mode of the second. The unity of the *habitus* would no longer be safeguarded. We explained our thought in this matter in *La Vie spirituelle*,²⁰⁰⁴ and we need not repeat it here. Suffice it to state here that St. Thomas clearly admits that the same gift, for example, that of wisdom, has acts that differ notably on earth and in heaven, but the earthly mode in the obscurity of faith is essentially ordained to the celestial mode, which will be found in the clarity of vision; thus, the unity of the *habitus* is safeguarded. It would not be so otherwise.

The gifts dispose us to receive a special inspiration, but in view of a determined operation having a formal object, which specifies one gift rather than another. By the gifts, St. Thomas says, we are more passive than active, but each is a *habitus receptivus*, ordained to a special action and not to actions of different natures.²⁰⁰⁵ It is thus that contemplation, to which the gift of wisdom is ordained, merits by its very nature the name of “infused,” since we cannot obtain it by our own efforts and it absolutely requires a special inspiration or illumination of the Holy Ghost, which we can only receive, as the earth receives the desired rain.

We are not speaking here of the more or less extraordinary phenomena that accidentally accompany infused contemplation, or of the occasionally simultaneous influence of certain graces *gratis datae*. But we are speaking of what is essentially required for infused contemplation, which has, moreover, many degrees, from the passive night of the senses up to the transforming union.

To avoid all confusion, all these questions should be distinguished from one another. This being the case, we say that, according to St. Thomas and St. John of the Cross, the full normal actualization of the gift of wisdom deserves the name of infused contemplation, properly so called, and that without this contemplation the full normal actualization of this gift does not yet exist. We do not believe that a Thomist can deny this proposition.

5. We have also established at length²⁰⁰⁶ that, according to St. Thomas and St. John of the Cross, infused contemplation does not demand infused species or infused ideas, but only the infused light of the gifts of understanding and wisdom, or the special illumination which they dispose us to receive. Replying to Father Lithard,²⁰⁰⁷ we showed that the texts from St. Thomas on the mystical knowledge of Adam in the state of innocence do not permit us to affirm anything additional. The light of wisdom, which he speaks of in *De veritate*,²⁰⁰⁸ is clearly the infused light of the gift of wisdom, which he treats of *ex professo* in the *Summa*.²⁰⁰⁹

Moreover, in his letter Father Lithard, in order to characterize the distinctly new experience of mystics “which introduces them into another world,” says: “What they knew by faith, they taste in faith.” This is, strictly speaking, the quasi-experiential knowledge which, according to St. Thomas, proceeds from the gift of wisdom and makes faith sweet. In these spiritual tastes, so different from sensible consolations, there are, besides, many degrees, from the initial infused contemplation of the passive night of the senses up to that of the transforming union.

If essentially mystical contemplation required a special light other than that to which the gift of wisdom normally disposes us, there might be a great non-mystical contemplative who would have a high degree of the gift of wisdom without this special particularity and, inversely, there might be a mystic who would not have the eminent exercise of the gifts of the Holy Ghost, but only a charismatic light suggestive rather of graces *gratis datae*.

6. In our writings on these subjects over a period of twenty years we have pointed out that, as a rule, the persons who adhere to the doctrine that we consider traditional are especially those who have experience of infused contemplation, and that many of those who do not adhere to this doctrine admit that they have not this experience. But they seek to imagine it according to their reading, and question the meaning of the terms used by the mystics: to see God, to feel Him, to touch Him. It is not indeed a question of the immediate vision of God as He is but, as St. Thomas says, of a quasi-experiential knowledge of God in the infused love which He inspires in us for Himself.²⁰¹⁰

In that part of his letter where he says, as it were incidentally, “abstraction being made of instinctive delight,” Father Lithard recognizes that this delight is not within our capability or in our power, but that it is infused. Is it then something negligible? And is it not precisely because of this delight that farther on in the same letter he can write: “The fortunate privileged souls speak of a distinctly new, additional experience, introducing them as it were into another world: what they knew by faith, they taste in faith”? This is what St. Thomas always calls the essential effect of the gift of wisdom, when he quotes the well-known text: “Taste, and see that the Lord is sweet.”²⁰¹¹

7. Father Lithard thinks that the masters of the spiritual life have given us the general principles, but have left us the task of stating them precisely: a question of progress in this branch of theology, as in dogmatic and moral theology.

We believe that masters like St. Thomas, St. John of the Cross, and St. Francis de Sales, have given us more than general principles, and that we are still far from a full comprehension of what their works contain on these difficult questions. Before setting ourselves the task of completing their work, we must try to understand thoroughly what they have written. In particular the author of *The Dark Night* and *The Living Flame* has stated with great care and precision what concerns infused contemplation and its various degrees, and what it is in the passive purifications or outside of them. To state more precisely and to complete what St. John of the Cross says about these lofty questions, one would need great experience in these matters, coupled with a profound knowledge of theology. Progress here is something very elevated and is realized as a rule not by those who propose it to themselves in advance, but by those to whom it is given to accomplish it, as was the case with St. John of the

Cross. It still remains for us to penetrate, to grasp more profoundly, what he has taught, avoiding every excessively material interpretation that would constitute a serious diminution of his thought.

We must always revert to the definition of infused contemplation given by St. John of the Cross in *The Dark Night*, a definition that is so conformable to the teaching of St. Thomas: “Contemplation is the science of love, which is an infused loving knowledge of God.”²⁰¹² In this definition St. John does not speak of a direct and immediate intuition of the supernatural gifts of grace and of the infused virtues, an intuition which, moreover, would give us a certitude of being in the state of grace before even reaching the transforming union. For all these reasons we maintain here what we stated about the intimate nature of infused contemplation in articles 3–6, chapter 4 of *Christian Perfection and Contemplation*.

The Agreement and Differences Between St. Teresa and St. John of the Cross

Even after a single reading of the works of St. Teresa and of St. John of the Cross it is easy to note differences between them, which have often been pointed out. We shall indicate here especially the origin of these differences.

THE CAUSE OF THESE DIFFERENCES

The differences found in the works of St. Teresa and St. John of the Cross are due to the diversity of their point of view. St. Teresa speaks a great deal from her personal experiences and describes the seven mansions of the interior castle by mentioning extraordinary graces which she herself had received (suspension of the senses, ecstasies, and visions), without taking particular care to distinguish these phenomena, which are in a way exterior and accidental, from what constitutes the basis of the mystical life, from the essential element in each of the seven mansions. St. Teresa is thus led to give more importance than other authors do to sensible phenomena, which sometimes accompany infused contemplation and mystical union. She also insists on the consideration of our Savior's humanity. In short, she is less attentive than others in distinguishing in the seven mansions what pertains to the normal way of sanctity, in particular the passive purifications which this sanctity presupposes.

St. John of the Cross no doubt also speaks from personal experience and from that of the souls he directed, but without mentioning it, for he seeks especially what is essential in the progress of the soul toward close union with God. He made a theological study of these matters, which St. Teresa did not, and his study has unquestionably great importance in distinguishing what is normal from what is accessory or accidental. In relation to the interior life, he examined thoroughly what theology teaches about the three theological virtues and the gifts that accompany them. Consequently he endeavors to explain the states of prayer of contemplative souls by the causes which produce them, linking them to infused faith, vivified by charity and illumined by the gifts of wisdom and understanding, thereby discerning better what the progress of the love of God should ordinarily be in every truly generous contemplative soul. From this point of view, he is particularly attentive to what is in the normal way of sanctity, and he studies more profoundly than any of his predecessors the passive purifications of the senses and of the spirit, necessary for the perfect purity of the love of God. Hence he is led to insist less on the extraordinary graces which sometimes accompany infused contemplation and which, in his works, appear more like concomitant phenomena that are, so to speak, exterior and accidental. He also dwells less on the consideration of our Savior's humanity, that he may fix his attention on the primary object of infused contemplation, which proceeds from faith under, the special inspiration of the gifts of understanding and wisdom; this object is God Himself, present in us and attained in the obscurity of faith by a quasi-experiential knowledge, which He Himself excites in us.

We, as well as many others, have often pointed out these differences. They show that the author of *The Dark Night* does much to complete what we read in St. Teresa and they make the understanding of her works easier for the theologian who seeks to explain, by their proximate principle or their cause, the states described by the mystics.

WHETHER THESE DIFFERENCES HAVE A COMMON BASIS

In recent years a number of theologians (Father Arintero, O.P., Father Garate, S.J., Canon Saudrea, and several others) have shown that these differences have a common basis. We expressed the same opinion in *Christian Perfection and Contemplation*.²⁰¹³ As a matter of fact, although St. Teresa speaks from personal experience, she is sufficiently well acquainted with that of her daughters to be able to set forth in the description of the seven mansions what ordinarily happens to souls passing through them. And, making use of the indications that she gives in various passages, we can discern more clearly what is essential to the mystical life, even in each of the seven mansions, and what is only a concomitant phenomenon, such as ecstasy or a beginning of ecstasy. As we have pointed out²⁰¹⁴ several times, St. Teresa says clearly that in the prayer of quiet first of all the will alone is seized, captivated by God, then the intellect and the imagination; finally, in ecstasy, the exercise of the exterior senses is suspended. But St. Teresa knows that the suspension of the imagination and the senses is only a concomitant and accessory phenomenon of infused contemplation. Speaking to her daughters she says: "In reality there are very few who never enter this mansion: some more and some less, but most of them may be said at least to gain admittance into these rooms. I think that certain graces I am about to describe are bestowed on only a few of the nuns, but if the rest only arrive at the portal, they receive a great boon from God, for 'many are called, but few are chosen.'"²⁰¹⁵

St. Teresa is well aware of the fact that ecstasy is not a certain sign of a greater intensity of knowledge and love of God,

since she says that it generally ceases in the most perfect mystical state, the transforming union.²⁰¹⁶ Father Lallemand, S.J., rightly insisted on this point.²⁰¹⁷

St. Teresa also notes that in the prayer of quiet, “where the will alone is captive,” the other faculties are at times the auxiliaries of the will and engage in its service; at other times their contribution serves only to trouble it. “When the will enjoys this quiet,” she says, “it should take no more notice of the understanding (or imagination) than it would of an idiot.”²⁰¹⁸ The saint also says that the consolation springing from the prayer of quiet is often interrupted by aridities, by temptations against patience and chastity, that is, by the trials which St. John of the Cross speaks of in the passive night of the senses.²⁰¹⁹ This explains why, even for St. Teresa, over and above consoled quiet, there is arid quiet, which St. Jane de Chantal²⁰²⁰ described several times, and which is found in what the author of *The Dark Night* calls the passive purification of the senses.

St. Teresa also points out that the prayer of union, described in the fifth mansion, is often incomplete, without the suspension of the imagination and memory, which sometimes wage a veritable war on the understanding and the Will.²⁰²¹ Then, as in the prayer of quiet, the soul should pay no more attention to the imagination than to an idiot,²⁰²² St. Teresa is speaking of this incomplete mystical union when she says: “Is it necessary, in order to attain to this kind of divine union, for the powers of the soul to be suspended? No; God has many ways of enriching the soul and bringing it to these mansions besides what might be called a ‘short cut.’”²⁰²³

Some have believed this “short cut” and the delights found in it to be infused or mystical contemplation, whereas it is only the suspension of the imagination and the memory, or a beginning of ecstasy, which sometimes accompanies mystical union and greatly aids it. Father Arintero, O.P.,²⁰²⁴ Father Garate, S.J.,²⁰²⁵ and Canon Saudreau²⁰²⁶ have shown this to be so.

If St. Teresa were to say that a soul can reach the fifth mansion by a non-mystical way, or without infused contemplation, she would state the contrary of what she often affirms in *The Way of Perfection*²⁰²⁷ and also in the fourth mansion of *The Interior Castle*. Since, as a matter of fact, in the fourth mansion the prayers of supernatural or passive recollection and quiet are already infused (and this is the essential characteristic of this period of the interior life), with even greater reason those of the fifth mansion are infused.²⁰²⁸

The prayer of passive union is, therefore, not extraordinary in its principle or in its very essence, although certain of its accidental, concomitant phenomena may be. St. John of the Cross certainly shows this more clearly, but even in *The Interior Castle* it is quite manifest.

Lastly, it should be noted that St. Teresa describes in the first chapter of the sixth mansion a very painful period of trial which manifestly corresponds to what St. John of the Cross calls the passive night of the spirit preceding perfect union. St. Teresa speaks of “the interior anguish of the soul at the sight of its own wretchedness.... For one of the severe trials of these souls... is their belief that God permits them to be deceived in punishment for their sins,... When... they discover any faults in themselves, these torturing thoughts return.... They become almost unbearable. Especially is this the case when such spiritual dryness ensues that the mind feels as if it never had thought of God, nor ever will be able to do so.”

These observations permit us to recognize a common principle under the differences found between St. Teresa and St. John of the Cross. Moreover, how could it be otherwise, since both of them describe the way of perfect union and the different stages in this ascent?

A RECENT OBJECTION

Quite recently, however, in the *Traduction nouvelle des oeuvres de saint Jean de la Croix*, by Mother Mary of the Blessed Sacrament of the Carmel of Mangalore (Vol. III, appendix 5), the translator, to whom we owe a fluent and generally faithful version of the works of St. Teresa (known as the Edition of the Carmelites of Paris), insists almost solely on the differences between the two great saints of Carmel. This appendix recalls the general introduction of the same work, which seemed to reach the conclusion that there is disagreement between the two saints, especially in regard to the consideration of Christ’s humanity. In the *Etudes Carmelitaines* (April, 1934), Father Eliseus of the Nativity insisted on rectifying immediately certain conclusions, which he declared to be contrary to the text of *The Interior Castle* and to the ensemble of the teaching of St. John of the Cross²⁰²⁹ He writes as follows: “In vain Reverend Mother eagerly repeats that it is not a question of ‘contradiction’; we are surprised to learn suddenly from her that St. John of the Cross was—Heavens! it must be said—so roughly treated by the Foundress.”²⁰³⁰

In the fifth appendix, contained in the third volume of this translation, the translator insists on eleven differences relating to the way the two saints conceived of contemplation, its beginnings, infused character, the cooperation that the soul may bring to it, by disposing itself for it or failing to do so, relating also to the passive purifications, to the role of faith in contemplation, to extraordinary favors, to illusions, to the humanity of Christ, to death to the world. After these eleven differences, one would expect to see the points of agreement between these two great saints on the lofty subject of infused contemplation and the union with God resulting from it. However, we are told nothing about this subject. The translator seems even to believe that, to find

this agreement, the profound knowledge which theology can give of the theological virtues and the gifts of the Holy Ghost is not of great use.

As a rule Thomistic theologians, those of Carmel as well as those of the Order of St. Dominic, especially Cajetan, O.P.,²⁰³¹ Joseph of the Holy Ghost, CD.,²⁰³² more recent writers,²⁰³³ Father Gardeil, O.P.,²⁰³⁴ and also Father de la Taille, S.J., and many others hold that infused contemplation proceeds from infused faith enlightened by the gifts (*a fide infusa donis illustrata*), or that it is “an act of the virtue of faith actuated by the Holy Ghost, whose touch causes the gifts to vibrate.”

On this subject the translator tells us: “As for these subtle deductions, we are far from making them ours. It is certain that St. John of the Cross gives faith an extremely preponderant place in his mystical teaching.—Does St. Teresa make contemplation rest on the exercise of the virtue of faith? In no way.”²⁰³⁵

If this were really the case, there would be a serious disagreement. But she is obliged to recognize a few lines farther on that “the virtue of faith evidently exists in her contemplation [that of St. Teresa] like a substratum.” Then how can she maintain that St. Teresa “does not make contemplation rest in any way whatsoever on the exercise of the infused virtue of faith”?

And how faintly comprehend “the extremely preponderant place” which she admits that St. John of the Cross gives to faith in his mystical teachings, if one does not go more deeply into what the theology of St. Thomas and his best commentators can tell us on this subject, if one dispenses oneself from examining it, and says: “As for these subtle deductions, we are far from making them ours”? Would St. Teresa, who willingly sought light from theologians, have spoken thus?

In the same appendix, apropos of what we wrote in *Perfection chretienne et contemplation*²⁰³⁶ on the subject of the passage from meditation, which has become impracticable, to initial infused contemplation (with the meaning given to it by St. John of the Cross), the translator reminds us that, “to advise St. Teresa’s prayer of quiet for a soul which God does not gratify with it, would be entirely wasted effort.”²⁰³⁷ We did not at all forget when writing that passage that the prayer of quiet is infused and not acquired, even in its essential element, abstraction being made of a given concomitant and consoling phenomenon which facilitates it. We said repeatedly in the same work that no one can acquire it, although one can prepare oneself to receive the special inspiration of the Holy Ghost which is its proximate principle. With this meaning, St. Teresa herself speaks of the noria (waterwheel) which symbolizes this work, which prepares the soul to receive the divine illumination.²⁰³⁸

The translator also points out to us in the same appendix, apropos of the aforementioned passage, that we did not mention between “meditation, which has become impracticable” and “the prayer of quiet,” the initial obscure contemplation which St. John of the Cross speaks of in the night of the senses (that contemplation later on occasionally called acquired or mixed contemplation, which prepares for infused), or that which St. Jane de Chantal speaks of. We are all the more surprised at this remark since, in the lines which precede the passage mentioned and in those which follow it, we speak precisely of the initial infused contemplation of St. John of the Cross, and of that of “simple surrender to God” of St. Jane de Chantal.²⁰³⁹

We conclude by repeating that if between the two great mystics of Carmel there exist certain differences easy to see and often pointed out, which are clearly explained by the fact that St. John of the Cross is a theologian and St. Teresa is not, there is, nevertheless, in their works an undeniable common principle, a fundamental conception of infused contemplation, of the union with God which results from it, and of the passive purifications necessary to reach perfect union.

If it is fitting to point out their differences, it is even more important to indicate their fundamental agreement; and in order to see in what this harmony consists, one should not neglect the help which the profound study of theology can give in these difficult questions. It is highly important to distinguish in the mystical life, and even in each of the seven mansions, between what is essential and normal and what is an accessory and concomitant phenomenon.²⁰⁴⁰

PART 4

The Unitive Way of the Perfect

Section I

The Entrance into the Unitive Way through the Night of the Spirit

In accordance with our plan for the division of this work,²⁰⁴¹ we shall follow the teaching of St. John of the Cross, who is the faithful echo of the tradition of the great spiritual writers, and treat of the night of the spirit at the beginning of the unitive way, since, according to the Mystical Doctor, the night of the spirit marks the entrance into this way, understood in its full and intense meaning. We shall see the nature of the passive purification of the spirit, the conduct to be observed in it, its effects, and the principal characteristics of the spiritual age of the perfect or of souls already purified.

DIVISION OF PART IV

In this fourth part we shall discuss, first of all, the entrance into the unitive way. According to St. John of the Cross, the soul enters this way by the passive purification of the spirit, which he explains in the second book of *The Dark Night*. In our opinion the Mystical Doctor thus preserves and examines thoroughly the traditional doctrine, because he considers the illuminative way of proficients and the unitive way of the perfect not in their diminished forms, but in their normal plenitude. From this higher point of view, the illuminative way demands the passive purification of the senses, which, we have seen, marks the entrance to it and is like a second conversion, analogous to that of the apostles, especially of Peter, during the dark night of the Passion. For the same reason, the unitive way of the perfect demands a passive purification of the spirit, which is like a third conversion, or rather a transformation of the soul, similar to that experienced by the apostles when, after being painfully deprived of the presence of Christ on Ascension Day, they received the Holy Ghost on Pentecost. This new purification strengthened them greatly and prepared them for their apostolate, which from then on, was to have its source in the plenitude of the contemplation of the mystery of Christ. This was truly the case, as St Peter's sermons on Pentecost and the following days show.²⁰⁴²

We shall, therefore, discuss, first of all, the necessity of the passive purification of the spirit because of the defects which subsist in proficients or the advanced. We shall see the nature of this purification and its theological explanation; we shall give the rules for direction appropriate at this stage, and point out the effects of this purification and its concomitant trials.

It will then be easier to characterize the spiritual age of the perfect, to see the nature of the indwelling of the Blessed Trinity in the purified soul, to describe the contemplative faith of the perfect, their confidence in God, their abandonment, charity, and zeal. We shall thus be led to speak of the transforming union, following chiefly St. John of the Cross, and of the radiation of this intimate union with God in the life of reparation and in the apostolate. We shall thus be able better to determine what constitutes the full perfection of Christian life, the normal prelude of the life of heaven and the immediate disposition to receive the beatific vision without passing through purgatory.

To show more clearly in what this normal plenitude of Christian life consists, we shall not discuss in this Section the essentially extraordinary graces that sometimes accompany and even precede the transforming union; we shall deal with them in the following section. Thus we can draw a clearer distinction between every essentially extraordinary grace and the normal summit of the life of grace on earth, that is, the full development of the virtues and the gifts of the Holy Ghost. To be sure, this summit is an eminent and relatively rare state, like lofty perfection; but it does not follow that it is an intrinsically extraordinary favor, like the gift of prophecy and other charisms, or graces *gratis datae*, which are, besides, inferior to sanctifying grace. St. Thomas²⁰⁴³ proves that prophecy and other similar charisms are only as it were exterior signs, whereas sanctifying grace, from which proceed charity, the other infused virtues, and the gifts, unites us to God and tends while growing to unite us ever more closely to Him, until it merits the name of consummated grace, which is eternal life itself.

The necessity of the Passive Purification of the Spirit, and the Prelude of the Unitive Way

Christ said: "I am the true vine; and My Father is the husbandman. Every branch in Me that beareth not fruit, He will take away: and everyone that beareth fruit, He will purge it, that it may bring forth more fruit.... He that abideth in Me, and I in him, the same beareth much fruit.... If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you shall ask whatever you will; and it shall be done unto you."²⁰⁴⁴ But to reach this state, the good branch must be pruned. In his commentary on St. John's Gospel, St. Thomas says: "In the natural vine, the branch which has many shoots yields less fruit, because the sap loses its efficacy by excessive diffusion in these superfluous shoots; therefore the vine-dresser prunes them. Something similar occurs in a man who is well disposed and united to God, but whose affection and life are excessively exteriorized in various ways; the strength of his interior life is then diminished and less efficacious in regard to the good to be accomplished. For this reason the Lord, who in this respect is like the vine-dresser, prunes His good servants and frequently cuts away what is useless in them so that they may bear more fruit. He purifies them for a long time, sending them tribulations, permitting temptations that oblige them to a holy and meritorious resistance, which renders them stronger in regard to the good. The Lord inures to war and thus purifies those who are already pure, for no one is ever sufficiently so on earth, according to St. John's statement: 'If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us' (I John 1:8). Thus the Lord purifies His servants so that they may bear more fruit, that they may grow in virtue and be proportionately richer in good works as they are more pure.

This text from St. Thomas' commentary on St. John refers properly to the passive purifications, which the just man does not impose upon himself like mortification, but which he receives from God. Thus was purified holy Job, who declared: "The life of man upon earth is a warfare."²⁰⁴⁵ It is a time of laborious and painful service, a time of trial, like the life of a soldier. Such it was for the apostles after Christ left them on Ascension Day, and they assembled in the upper room to pray and prepare themselves for the struggles which Christ had announced to them, and which were to be crowned by their martyrdom.

The fathers of the Church and spiritual writers have often spoken in this intimate sense of the cross we must bear daily, the cross of the sensibility and that of the spirit, that the lower and the higher parts of the soul may gradually be purified, that the sensitive part may be perfectly subjected to the spirit, and the spirit to God.

The fathers have often commented on these words of Scripture: "As when one sifteth with a sieve, the dust will remain: so will the perplexity of a man in his thoughts. The furnace trieth the potter's vessels, and the trial of affliction just men."²⁰⁴⁶ "For gold and silver are tried in the fire, but acceptable men in the furnace of humiliation."²⁰⁴⁷ "From above He hath sent fire into my bones,"²⁰⁴⁸ said Jeremias in his Lamentations. Christ likewise said to Peter before the Passion: "Simon, Simon, behold Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat."²⁰⁴⁹ Now this is realized especially in the passive purification of the spirit, which prepares the soul for the life of close union with God. St. Augustine,²⁰⁵⁰ St. Gregory the Great,²⁰⁵¹ St. Maxim,²⁰⁵² Hugh of St. Victor,²⁰⁵³ Ruysbroeck,²⁰⁵⁴ Tauler,²⁰⁵⁵ and more profoundly St. John of the Cross,²⁰⁵⁶ have shown that this purification is necessary because of the defects that remain in the proficients or advanced.

THE DEFECTS OF THE ADVANCED

Consideration of this subject is advantageous to interior souls, especially for three reasons: that they may see more clearly the necessity and the value of the daily cross that each must carry; that they may also better discern the unreasonable troubles which they foolishly create for themselves from those which have a true purifying value; lastly, that they may get a more exact idea of purgatory, which will be necessary for them if they do not profit sufficiently by the crosses sent to them in this life.

There are still many defects in proficients who have made considerable progress, the inferior or sensible part of whose souls is already in large part purified, and who have begun to live the life of the spirit through the initial infused contemplation of the mysteries of faith. The stains of the old man still remain in their spirit like rust that will disappear only under the action of a purifying fire.

St. John of the Cross points out²⁰⁵⁷ that these advanced souls are still often subject to indirectly voluntary distractions in prayer, to dullness, to useless dissipation, to excessively human sympathy for certain persons, leading to a lack of esteem for others, which is more or less contrary to justice and charity. They have moments of natural rudeness, the result of the sin of impatience. Some fall into illusion by being too much attached to certain spiritual communications; they expose themselves to the devil, who takes pleasure in deceiving them by false prophecies. Others, under the same influence, fall into bitter zeal, which leads them to sermonize their neighbor and to deliver untimely remonstrances. Thereby, though unaware of it, these

advanced souls are puffed up with spiritual pride and presumption and thus deviate from the simplicity, humility, and purity required for close union with God. St. John of the Cross says: “Some of them become so entangled in manifold falsehoods and delusions, and so persist in them that their return to the pure road of virtue and real spirituality is exceedingly doubtful”²⁰⁵⁸ Evidently there are greater dangers than those at the beginning.

According to the holy doctor, this matter is inexhaustible; and so far he has considered only the defects relative to the purely interior life, to relations with God. What would it be if one were to consider the defects that advanced souls still have in their relations with superiors, equals, and inferiors; if one were to consider all that, in this period of the spiritual life, still injures charity and justice; all that, in those who have to teach, govern or direct souls, stains their apostolate, teaching, government, and direction?

Spiritual or intellectual pride, which still subsists, inspires excessive attachment to personal judgment, to one’s own way of seeing, feeling, sympathizing, willing. From it are born jealousy, secret ambition, or again great authoritarianism, unless one is by temperament inclined to the contrary defect, that is, to excessive indulgence and to weakness toward those who oppress others. Here too, may often be remarked a lack of promptness and generosity in obedience, or, on the contrary, a servility inspired by self-love. Frequent also are faults against charity through jealousy, envy, slander, discord, contention.

At this stage may reappear many deviations, which seriously trouble the life of the soul. The root of the higher faculties of intellect and will is still deeply tainted with pride, personal judgment, and self-will. The divine light and the will of God do not yet reign there uncontested; far from it. These stains, which are in the root of the higher faculties, have, in some cases, been there for a long time; they may become encrusted as they grow old and may profoundly alter the character by turning it away from true intimacy with God. Thence are born many defamations and at times most grievous divisions among those who should work together for the good of souls.

St. John of the Cross says that this state of things shows that, “if they be not removed by the strong soap and lye of the purgation of this night, the spirit cannot attain to the pureness of the divine Union.”²⁰⁵⁹ “The intercourse of proficients with God is, however, still most mean, because the gold of the spirit is not purified and refined. They think, therefore, and speak of Him as children (they have little understanding of the ways of Providence, which humiliates them in order to exalt them), and their feelings are those of children, as described by the Apostle: ‘When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child,’”²⁰⁶⁰ because they have not reached perfection, which is union with God in love. But in the state of union, having grown to manhood, they do great things in spirit—all their actions and all their faculties being now rather divine than human.²⁰⁶¹ This is a clear way of stating that the full perfection of Christian life belongs normally to the mystical order, since it presupposes the passive purifications of the senses and of the spirit, which are sharply characterized passive or mystical states easily distinguished from melancholy and other fruitless spells of dejection of the same kind, as we shall see farther on. It is a question here of fruitful spiritual suffering and of a spiritual winter that prepares the germination of a new spring. Winter is indispensable in nature; there is also one which may be very useful in the life of the soul.

This is why St. Augustine used to say the prayer, often repeated centuries later by St. Louis Bertrand: “Lord, burn, cut, do not spare on this earth, that Thou mayest spare in eternity.” It is important to be purified on earth with merit rather than after death without merit. Nothing soiled enters heaven; consequently, to enter there the soul must, sooner or later, undergo a profound purification. The beatific vision of the divine essence cannot, it is evident, be granted to a soul that is still impure.

THE DEPTHS OF THE WILL TO BE PURIFIED

Before St. John of the Cross, Tauler greatly insisted on the depths of our will, which need to be purified from the often unconscious egoism that has for long subsisted in it, leading us to disturbing and fruitless conversation with ourselves and not to tranquilizing and vivifying conversation with God.

Tauler²⁰⁶² often speaks of the unconscious egoism that still inclines us to seek ourselves in everything and at times to judge our neighbor with severity while treating ourselves with great indulgence. This same egoism which makes us seek ourselves in many things is especially evident when trial strikes us; we are then completely upset and seek help, consolation, and counsel from without, where God is not to be found. We have not built our house sufficiently on Christ the rock, with the result that it lacks solidity. We have built on self, on self-will, which is equivalent to building on sand; thus at times there is great weakness underlying harshness of judgment.

Tauler declares: “There is only one way to triumph over these obstacles: God would have to take complete possession of the interior of the soul and occupy it, which happens only to His true friends. He sent us His only Son in order that the holy life of the God-Man, His great and perfect virtue, examples, teachings, and multiple sufferings might lift us above ourselves, make us leave ourselves completely (draw us from this depth of egoism), and that we might let our own pallid light disappear in the true and essential light.”²⁰⁶³

“This light [of the Word made flesh] shines in the darkness, but the darkness did not comprehend it (John 1:5). None but the

poor in spirit and those who are completely stripped of self, of self-love, and of their individual wills, receive this light. There are many who have been materially poor for forty years and who have never received the slightest [interior] ray of it. Through their senses and reason, they know thoroughly what is said of this light, but, in its essence, they have never tasted it; it is foreign to them and remains far from them.”²⁰⁶⁴

Again Tauler says: “It is thus that, whereas simple common folk followed our Lord, the Pharisees, the princes of the priests and the scribes, every class that had the appearance of sanctity, harshly opposed Him and ended by putting Him to death.”²⁰⁶⁵ God is the grandeur of humble souls, and His very lofty ways remain hidden to our pride.

We see, consequently, to what extremities we may be led by this depth of egoism and pride which blinds us and hinders us from recognizing our sins. Therefore it is important that the light of life of living faith and of the gifts of the Holy Ghost should penetrate the depths of our intellect and, as it were, the root of our will.

That we may receive this light and these gifts, it is not sufficient to know the letter of the Gospel and adhere to it; we must assimilate its spirit profoundly. Otherwise, appearing as Christians and using the language of Christians, we would preserve in the depths of our being something which is not Christian and which resists the light of life. There would be in the depths of our intellect and will as it were a citadel which would serve as a refuge for self-love, which is unwilling to surrender and to allow the reign of God to be profoundly and eternally established in us. Thereby certain souls, that think themselves quite advanced but that do not recognize their defects, are in greater peril than the common run of men who admit that they are sinners and who preserve the fear of God.

Consequently we should meditate on Tauler’s conclusion: “Therefore, well-beloved children, employ all your activity, both of soul and body, to obtain that this true light may shine in you in such a way that you may taste it. In this way you will be able to return to your origin, where the true light shines. Desire, ask, with nature and without nature,²⁰⁶⁶ that this grace may be granted to you. Employ all your energy to this end, pray to the friends of God that they may help you in this work; attach yourself to those who are attached to God in order that they may lead you to God with them. May this grace be granted to all of us, and may the all loving God help us! Amen.”²⁰⁶⁷

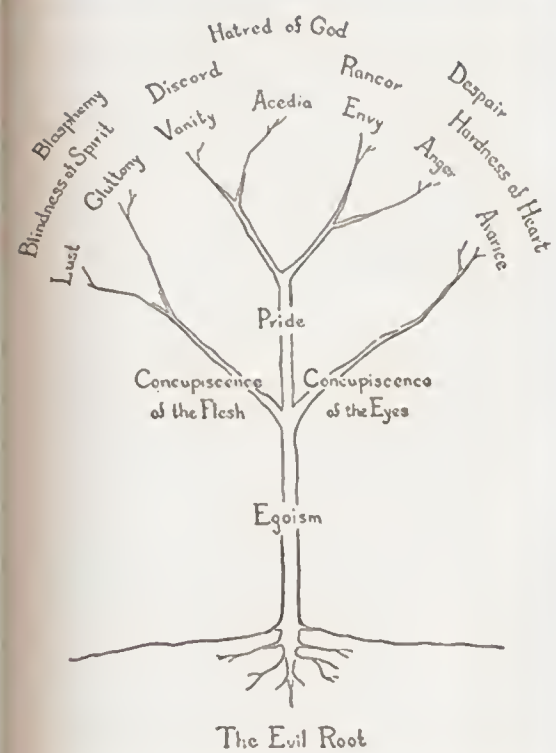
As a note in the translation which we have just quoted points out, Tauler draws a distinction here between the ordinary knowledge of faith, common to all the faithful, and mystical knowledge, the loving experience of God felt in the depths of the soul, which is reserved to the friends of God. Tauler invites all his hearers and readers to desire this intimate knowledge that transforms the center of the soul by illumining it, and that liberates it from this prison of egoism in which the soul had shut itself up. In this way alone can it be deified, divinized, by participating profoundly through grace in the inner life of God. All these defects, which still subsist in a measure in the depths of the intellect and will, even in the advanced, demand, therefore, a purification that God alone can effect. “God alone can deify, as fire alone can ignite,” St. Thomas says in substance.²⁰⁶⁸

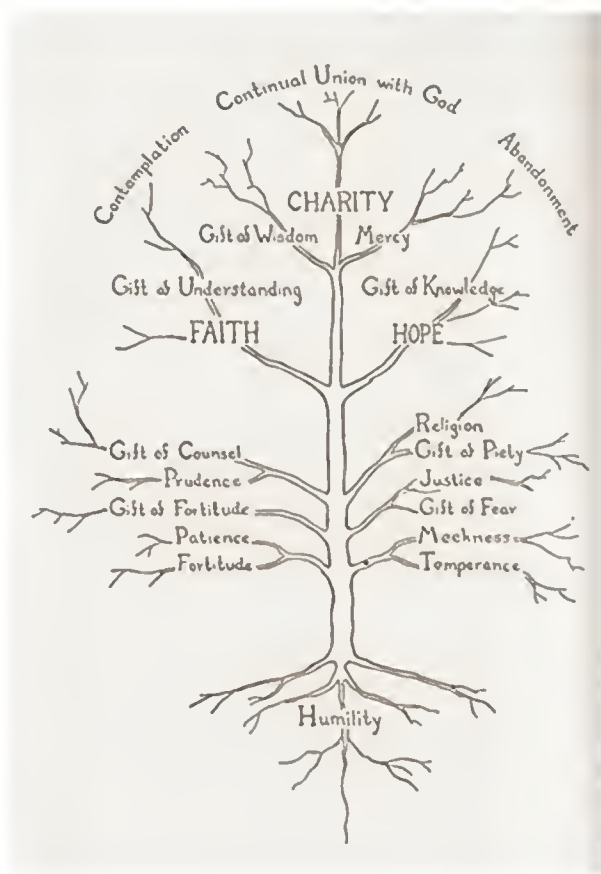
This passive purification will certainly not be without suffering, and, as St. John of the Cross teaches, it will even be a mystical death, the death to self, the disintegration of self-love, which until then has resisted grace, at times with great obstinacy. Here pride must receive the deathblow that it may give place to genuine humility, a virtue which has been compared to the deepest root of a tree, a root which buries itself so much the more deeply in the soil as the loftiest branch, the symbol of charity, rises higher toward the sky.

This center of the soul, the refuge of personal judgment and selflove that is often very subtle, must be illumined by the divine light and filled by God, rendered completely healthy, and vivified. On the feast of the Purification, at Mass and in the procession each person carries a lighted candle, the symbol of the light of life that each should bear in the innermost depths of his soul. This light of life was given to man on the first day of creation; extinguished by sin, it was rekindled by the grace of conversion and by the hope of the promised Redeemer. This light grew in the souls of the patriarchs and the prophets until the coming of Christ, “a light to the revelation of the Gentiles, and the glory of... Israel,” as the aged Simeon said in his beautiful canticle, *Nunc dimittis*, on the occasion of the presentation of Jesus in the Temple.

This same light of life, which grew in humanity until the advent of the Messias, should also grow in each of our souls from baptism until our entrance into heaven. It should gradually illumine and vivify the very center of our intellect and our heart that this depth may be not an obscure depth of egoism, personal judgment, and resistance to grace, but a depth of light and goodness where the Holy Ghost, the source of living water springing up into eternal life, may reign increasingly.

From what we have just said it is evident that the passive purification of the spirit, made necessary by the defects of proficients, is the decisive struggle between two spirits: the spirit of pride, which may grow even to blasphemy, to hatred of God, and despair, and that of humility and charity, which is eternal life begun in us. These two conflicting spirits may be symbolized by two trees, one of which illustrates the teaching of St. Gregory the Great and St. Thomas on the roots and results of the seven capital sins, while the other explains their doctrine on humility and charity, and the connection of these virtues with the other virtues and the seven gifts.





We showed earlier in this work,²⁰⁶⁹ following these two great doctors, that from egoism or inordinate self-love is born,—together with the concupiscence of the flesh and that of the eyes,—pride, from which proceed especially four capital sins: vanity, acedia, envy, and anger. We have also seen that from the capital sins spring other defects and sins that are often still more serious; among them should be noted particularly blindness of spirit, discord, rancor, hardness of heart, blasphemy, hatred of God, and despair. The tree of evil with its accursed flowers and poisonous fruits symbolizes these sins.

In contradistinction, the tree of the virtues and of the gifts has for its root humility, a root which penetrates more and more deeply into the earth in order to draw nourishing secretions from it. The lower branches of this tree are the cardinal virtues with the connected virtues and the corresponding gifts; its higher branches are faith, hope, and charity, the last being the loftiest and most fruitful. To faith is attached the gift of understanding, and also that of knowledge, which greatly perfects hope by showing us the vanity of created things, the inefficacy of human helps for a divine end, and by leading us consequently to desire eternal life and to place our trust in God. To charity corresponds the gift of wisdom. From it principally proceeds contemplation; and from contemplation, actual union with God, which should become almost continuous, and also perfect abandonment.

That this tree of the virtues and of the gifts may reach its full development, there must be a definitive victory over the remains of intellectual and spiritual pride which subsist in proficients. Whence the necessity of the passive purification of the spirit in which, with an eminent help from the Holy Ghost, the soul makes heroic acts of the theological virtues to resist temptations contrary to these virtues.

Description of the Passive Purification of the Spirit

In the preceding chapter we discussed the defects of proficients or the advanced, the remains of spiritual or intellectual pride found in them, and the absolute need of purification for the depth of the soul impregnated with self-love and subtle egoism. The Lord alone can effect this profound purification.

We purpose here to describe this purification so that it may not be confused either with sufferings springing only from melancholy or neurasthenia, or with the sensible aridity of beginners. Such a confusion would evidently be an unpardonable error.²⁰⁷⁰

THE DARKNESS IN WHICH THE SOUL HAS THE IMPRESSION OF BEING

As the passive purification of the sensible part of the soul is manifested by the loss of the sensible consolations to which it was excessively attached, the passive purification of the spirit seems at first to consist in the deprivation of the lights previously received of the mysteries of faith. Having become too familiar, as it were, with them, the facility with which the soul considered them in prayer caused it to forget their infinite elevation; it thought of them in a manner somewhat too human. It dwelt, for example, a little too much on Christ's humanity, without living sufficiently by faith in His divinity; it attained as yet only the exterior aspects of the great mysteries of Providence, of the Incarnation, of the redemption, of the Mass, and of the life of the indefectible Church in the midst of continually recurring trials. The soul had still only a very superficial knowledge of these spiritual realities; its view of these mysteries was like that of a stained-glass window seen from without.

Then, what occurs? To lift the soul above this excessively inferior and superficial knowledge of divine things, the Lord detaches it from this way of thinking and praying and seems to strip it of its lights. In the words of St. John of the Cross: "God now denudes the faculties, the affections, and feelings, spiritual and sensual, interior and exterior, leaving the understanding in darkness, the will dry, the memory empty, the affections of the soul in the deepest affliction, bitterness, and distress; withholding from it the former sweetness it had in spiritual things."²⁰⁷¹

The sadness then experienced is very different from that which has its origin in neurasthenia, disillusion, or the contradictions of life. The chief difference is that the sadness of the passive purification of the spirit is accompanied by an ardent desire for God and perfection, by a persistent seeking after Him who alone can nourish the soul and vivify it. No longer only a sensible aridity, it is a dryness of the spiritual order, which springs, not from the deprivation of sensible consolations, but from the loss of the lights to which the soul was accustomed.

The soul should then walk "in the dark, in pure faith, which is the dark night of the natural faculties."²⁰⁷² It can no longer easily apply itself to the consideration of our Savior's humanity; on the contrary, it is deprived of such consideration, as were the apostles immediately after Christ's ascension into heaven. During the months preceding the Ascension, their intimacy with Him had grown daily; it had become their life, and then one day He took final leave of them on this earth, thus depriving them of the sight of Him and of His encouraging words. They must have felt very much alone, as it were, isolated, especially while thinking of the difficulties of the mission our Savior had entrusted to them: the evangelization of an impious world, plunged in all the errors of paganism. On the evening of Ascension Day, the apostles must have experienced the impression of profound solitude, similar to that of the desert and of death. We can get a slight idea of this solitude, when, after living in a higher plane during a fervent retreat under the direction of a priest who is closely united to God, we return to ordinary everyday life, which seems suddenly to deprive us of this plenitude. The same thing is true, and indeed much more so, after the death of a father, of a founder of an order, for those whom he leaves and who must continue his work. Thus after Christ's ascension, the apostles remained gazing toward heaven; their beloved Master had been taken from their gaze, and they felt alone in the face of all the sufferings to come.

They must then have recalled Christ's words: "I tell you the truth: it is expedient to you that I go. For if I go not, the Paraclete will not come to you; but if I go, I will send Him to you."²⁰⁷³ "It is expedient to you that I go," that I deprive you of My sensible presence. In his commentary on St. John (loc. cit.), St. Thomas says: "The apostles were attached to the humanity of Christ, they did not rise sufficiently to the spiritual love of His divinity, and were not yet prepared to receive the Holy Ghost... who was to be given to them to console them and strengthen them in the midst of their tribulations."

This deprivation of the sensible presence of Christ's humanity which preceded the transformation of the apostles, effected on Pentecost, throws light on the state of darkness and desolation that we are discussing. It seems to the soul in this state that it

enters a spiritual night, for it is deprived of the lights which hitherto illumined it; darkness descends as when the sun goes down.

THE REVELATION OF THE MAJESTY OF GOD IN THIS DARKNESS

But does the soul see nothing in this dark night? In the natural order when the sun has set and completely disappeared, at least some stars are visible, which convey an idea of the depth of the firmament. Hence at night we can see much farther than during the day; true, hills or mountains, fifty or a hundred miles away, are no longer visible, but we can see stars and constellations which are thousands of leagues from the earth. The nearest star requires four and a half years to send us its light. The sun seems larger than the stars, although those of the first six magnitudes are far greater than it.

In this natural fact we have a sensible symbol of a lofty truth. When the soul enters the spiritual darkness we are speaking of, it no longer sees what is near it, but it has an increasingly better anticipatory apprehension of the infinite majesty and purity of God, although it does not see it, an apprehension superior to all the ideas that we of ourselves can have of Him; and, by contrast, it perceives much more clearly its own indigence and wretchedness.

Thus after the Ascension, the apostles, deprived of the presence of Christ's humanity, began to glimpse all the majesty of the Son of God. On Pentecost, Peter preached to the Jews with unshakable faith: "But the Author of life you killed, whom God hath raised from the dead."²⁰⁷⁴ "This [Jesus] is the stone which was rejected by you the builders, which is become the head of the corner. Neither is there salvation in any other."²⁰⁷⁵

Such is the lofty contemplation born in the darkness of which we are speaking. When the sun has set, we see the stars in the depths of the firmament. But before enjoying the contemplation of the starry sky, we must become used to walking fearlessly in the night and triumphing over powerful temptations against faith and hope, just as, during the night of the senses, it was necessary to overcome many temptations against chastity and patience that have their seat in the sensible part of the soul.

We may profit by recalling the case of the holy Cure of Ars. His principal suffering sprang from the fact that he felt himself far from the ideal of the priesthood, whose grandeur appeared increasingly to him in the obscurity of faith, at the same time that he had an ever clearer understanding of the needs of the innumerable souls coming to him. The more he saw all the good that remained to be done, the less he saw what had already been accomplished; consequently he could not be complacent about it. His great suffering, which approached that of Jesus, Priest and Victim, and of Mary at the foot of the cross, was that which comes from the sight of sin and from the loss of souls. This suffering presupposes a penetrating view which is nothing else than the contemplation of the infinite goodness of God, who is disregarded and outraged, and of the value of eternal life. This contemplation grows more and more in the dark night of faith which we are discussing.

St. Catherine of Siena pointed out in her Dialogue that the contemplation of our indigence and wretchedness and that of the infinite majesty and goodness of God are like the lowest and highest points of a circle that could grow forever. In reality, in this contemplation there is a contrast, a clear-cut opposition between two things which in an admirable manner mutually illumine each other.

In the life of Blessed Angela of Foligno we find a striking example of this fact, which she recounts as follows: "I see myself deprived of every good, of every virtue, filled with a multitude of vices;... in my soul I see only defects... false humility, pride, hypocrisy.... I would wish to cry out my iniquities to others.... God is hidden for me.... How can I hope in Him?... Though all the wise men of the world and all the saints of paradise were to overwhelm me with their consolations, they would bring me no relief, if God does not change me in the depths of my soul. This interior torment is far worse than martyrdom."²⁰⁷⁶ Then, recalling that God Himself was afflicted in Gethsemane, that during His passion He was scorned, buffeted, and tortured, she wished that her suffering might be increased still more, for it seemed to her a purifying suffering, which revealed to her the depths of the Passion. Some days later, on a road near Assisi, she heard these interior words: "O My daughter! I love thee more than any other person in this valley.... Thou hast prayed to My servant Francis, hoping to obtain with him and through him. Francis loved Me greatly, I did much in him; but if anyone loved Me more than Francis, I would do more for him.... I love with an immense love the soul that loves Me without falsehood.... Now, no one has any excuse, for all the world can love; God asks only love from the soul; for He Himself loves without falsehood, and is Himself the love of the soul."²⁰⁷⁷ Causing her to glimpse His passion, Jesus crucified added: "Look closely: dost thou find anything in Me which is not love?"²⁰⁷⁸

Another striking example of the spiritual night which we are speaking of is found in St. Paul of the Cross, the founder of the Passionists. We read in his Letters:

Little corporal or spiritual tribulations are the first steps of this lofty and holy ladder which great and generous souls climb. They ascend step by step until they reach the last rung. There, at the summit, they find the purest suffering, without the slightest admixture of consolation coming from heaven or earth (the suffering which comes from offense offered to God). And if these souls are faithful in not seeking consolations, they will pass from this pure suffering to the pure love of God, without anything else being mingled with it. But rare are the souls which reach such a degree....

It seems to them that they are abandoned by God, that He no longer loves them, that He is irritated against them.... This is almost the pain of damnation, if I may express myself in this manner, a suffering, whose bitterness is comparable to no other. But if the soul is faithful, what treasures it amasses! The storms pass and go, the

These excerpts show that St. John of the Cross is not the only one who spoke profoundly of the night of the spirit because he had experienced it. Before him, Hugh of St. Victor had compared the passive purification of the soul by grace and the love of God to the transformation which green wood undergoes when attacked by fire: "The dampness is consumed, the smoke diminishes, the victorious flame shows itself,... finally it communicates its own nature to the wood, which is set completely on fire. Likewise the love of God gradually grows in the soul, the passions of the heart at first resist, which causes many sufferings and troubles; this thick smoke must be dissipated. Then the love of God becomes more ardent, its flame more lively... and finally it penetrates the entire soul. The divine truth is found and assimilated by contemplation; the soul, detached from self, no longer seeks anything but God. He is for it all in all; it rests in His love and finds therein joy and peace."²⁰⁸⁰

Speaking in like terms, Tauler says that the Holy Ghost creates a void in the depth of our souls where egoism and pride still dwell. He creates the void that He may heal us, and then He fills it to overflowing while continually increasing our capacity to receive.²⁰⁸¹

St. Teresa speaks of the passive purification of the spirit in the first chapter of the sixth mansion of *The Interior Castle*.

We read also in the life of St. Vincent de Paul that for four years he endured a trial of this type, which was marked by a persistent temptation against faith. The temptation was so strong that he wrote the Credo on a sheet of paper, which he carried over his heart and pressed from time to time to assure himself that he did not consent to the temptation.²⁰⁸²

We should also keep in mind that St. John of the Cross, after Tauler, describes this state as it is in the saints in all its amplitude and intensity, such as he himself must have undergone it. But the purification is found in lesser degrees and under less purely contemplative forms, united, for example, to the great trials met with in the apostolate.

If the passive purification of the spirit seems extraordinary to us outside the normal way of sanctity, this is because we do not give enough thought to what a profound purification of the soul is necessary to receive immediately eternal life, the beatific vision of the divine essence, without having to pass through purgatory or after having done so. And when we read the exposition of this doctrine in the great masters, we read it perhaps through a certain curiosity about divine things, but without a sufficiently sincere desire for our own sanctification. If we had this desire, we would find in these pages what is suitable for us, we would see there the one thing necessary.

We must in one way or another pass through this crucible in order to have a concept of our Savior's passion, of the humility of Jesus and His love for us, that will not be only a confused concept, or only a theoretically distinct concept, but an experimental concept, without which there is no love of the cross or true sanctity.

We must tell ourselves that the world is full of crosses that have unfortunately been lost like that of the bad thief. God grant that our sufferings may not be fruitless and that our crosses may resemble that of the good thief, which served as a reparation for his sins. May our crosses resemble even more closely the cross of Jesus and configure us to Him. Sanctifying grace, as it grows, makes us more and more like to God; inasmuch as it is Christian grace, it assimilates us to Christ crucified, and should make us grow more like Him until our entrance into heaven. It should mark us with the likeness of our Savior who died for love of us.

We must also take into account the inequality between souls and between their means. We must ask of souls only what they can give: of some, a continuous upward surge of heroism; of others, little steps, which bring them ever nearer the end to be attained. But, to be configured to Christ, every soul must sacrifice itself under some form or other.

The Cause of the Passive Purification of the Spirit

Having described in the preceding chapter the passive purification of the spirit as it appears especially in the interior lives of the great servants of God, we shall now explain this spiritual state theologically by determining its cause. We have seen that it consists chiefly in a profound experiential knowledge of our indigence and wretchedness and, by contrast, of the infinite majesty of God, a knowledge which is accompanied by great spiritual aridity and a lively desire for perfection. What can be the cause of this obscure and painful contemplation?

St. John of the Cross²⁰⁸³ answers, as theology must do, by invoking Holy Scripture, which speaks to us in a number of passages of a purifying light, a spiritual fire that rids the soul of its stains.

PURIFYING INFUSED LIGHT AND SPIRITUAL FIRE

The Book of Wisdom says of the just: “As gold in the furnace He hath proved them, and as a victim of a holocaust He hath received them.”²⁰⁸⁴ Gold in the crucible is purified by material fire; a still more intense fire is needed to transform coal into a diamond; likewise, in tribulation the soul of the just man is purified by a spiritual fire. Scripture often insists on this thought, telling us that God is a fire which gradually consumes whatever hinders His reign in souls.²⁰⁸⁵

Jeremias writes in his Lamentations: “From above He hath sent fire into my bones.... He hath made me desolate, wasted with sorrow all the day long.”²⁰⁸⁶ In the light of this spiritual fire, which in him, the prophet sees far more clearly the sins of Israel, the justice and goodness of God, and he prays earnestly to Him for the salvation of sinners.

The Psalmist says likewise: “Who can understand sins? From my secret ones cleanse me, O Lord.”²⁰⁸⁷ “My substance is as nothing before Thee.”²⁰⁸⁸ “O my God, enlighten my darkness.”²⁰⁸⁹ “Create a clean heart in me, O God.”²⁰⁹⁰ Thus, like a flash of lightning, the Holy Ghost illumines the soul He wishes to purify. He says at times to the soul: “Do you wish to be purified?” And if the reply is what it ought to be, a profound work begins in it; divine truth is given to the soul to deliver it from the depth of self-love that still so often deludes it. “If you continue in My word,” says Christ, “you shall be My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.”²⁰⁹¹ If anyone lives seriously by the words of Christ, correcting himself, the first Truth will gradually penetrate into his soul and deliver it from that most pernicious of lies, the lie that a person tells himself while cherishing his illusions.

We can never too strongly desire this purifying light which Scripture speaks of. Unfortunately we often flee from it, because we are afraid we may be told the truth about ourselves, when we so greatly love to tell others the truth about themselves.

St. John of the Cross simply explains the nature of the purifying light spoken of in Scripture, when he writes: “The dark night is a certain inflowing of God into the soul which cleanses it of its ignorances and imperfections, habitual, natural, and spiritual. Contemplatives call it infused contemplation, or mystical theology, whereby God secretly teaches the soul and instructs it in the perfection of love, without efforts on its own part beyond a loving attention to God, listening to His voice and admitting the light He sends, but without understanding how this is infused contemplation.”²⁰⁹² In the life of the holy Cure of Ars we have a striking example of this state. Comprehending better every day the loftiness of the priestly ideal and judging himself to be farther than ever from it, he certainly did not think then that he was a contemplative, and yet it was God Himself who was enlightening him and instructing him in this way.

Among the comparisons used to explain more clearly the spiritual state we are speaking of is one by Hugh of St. Victor,²⁰⁹³ which St. John of the Cross reproduces as follows: “This purgative and loving knowledge, or divine light,... is to the soul which it is purifying in order to unite it perfectly to itself,²⁰⁹⁴ as fire is to fuel which it is transforming into itself. The first action of material fire on fuel is to dry it, to expel from it all water and all moisture. It blackens it at once and soils it, and drying it little by little, makes it light and consumes all its foulness and blackness which are contrary to itself. Finally, having heated and set on fire its outward surface, it transforms the whole into itself, and makes it beautiful as itself.... It is in this way we have to reason about the divine fire of contemplative love which, before it unites with, and transforms the soul into itself, purges away all its contrary qualities. It expels its impurities, blackens it and obscures it, and thus its condition is apparently worse than it was before. For while the divine purgation is removing all the evil and vicious humors,... the soul—though not worse in itself, nor in the sight of God—seeing at last what it never saw before, looks upon itself not only as unworthy of His regard, but even as a loathsome object and that God does loathe it.”²⁰⁹⁵

This salutary crisis is a purgatory before death, in which the soul is purified under the influence, not of a sensible fire, but of

the spiritual fire of contemplation and love. “And thus,” says St. John of the Cross, “the soul which passes through this state in the present life, and is perfectly purified, either enters not into purgatory, or is detained there but a moment, for one hour here is of greater moment than many there.”²⁰⁹⁶ The reason is that on earth man is purified while meriting and growing greatly at times in charity, whereas after death he is purified without meriting. And as purgatory is a penalty and every penalty presupposes a sin that could have been avoided, the normal way of sanctity is to undergo the passive purifications of which we are speaking before death and not after death. In reality, however, rare are they who go immediately from earth to heaven, without passing through purgatory. The true order of Christian life is fully realized only in the saints.

Is the purifying light, which we have just spoken of, only that of living faith, or also that of one of the seven gifts of the Holy Ghost, present in all the Just? If we consider the characteristics of the gift of understanding, we see that it is chiefly this gift which intervenes in this state.

THE INFLUENCE OF THE GIFT OF UNDERSTANDING IN THIS PURIFICATION

St. John of the Cross offers the following explanation: “Because the soul is to attain to the possession of a certain sense and divine knowledge, most generous and full of sweetness, of all human and divine things which do not fall within the common-sense and natural perceptions of the soul, it views them with different eyes now; as the light and grace of the Holy Ghost differ from those of sense, the divine from the human.... For this night is drawing the spirit away from its ordinary and common sense of things, that it may draw it toward the divine sense, which is a stranger and an alien to all human ways; so much so that the soul seems to be carried out of itself.”²⁰⁹⁷

This teaching of St. John of the Cross receives additional light from what St. Thomas says about the gift of understanding and the new penetration and purification of which it is the principle. According to St. Thomas: “The stronger the light of the understanding, the further can it penetrate into the heart of things. Now the natural light of our understanding (even in the greatest geniuses) is of finite power; wherefore it can reach to a certain fixed point. Consequently man needs a supernatural light in order to penetrate further still (into God or into the depths of the life of the soul) so as to know what it cannot know by its natural light: and this supernatural light which is bestowed on man is called the gift of understanding.”²⁰⁹⁸ “Wherefore this addition is not called reason but understanding, since the additional light is in comparison with what know supernaturally, what the natural light is in regard to those things we know from the first.”²⁰⁹⁹

This gift presupposes faith united to charity and perfects it. Living faith makes us firmly adhere to the divine mysteries because God has revealed them, but of itself alone it does not yet make us penetrate the profound meaning of the mysteries, of the majesty of God, the Incarnation, the redemption, the humiliations of Christ dying for love of us. The penetration that we are here speaking of is not that which comes from study, from theological labor; it proceeds from a special illumination of the Holy Ghost, which, not abstractly and theoretically, but vitally, concretely, and practically, goes farther, higher, and deeper than study. Through the gift of understanding we receive this penetrating illumination with docility. It prevents us, first of all, from confusing the true meaning of the word of God with the erroneous interpretations sometimes given of it. This gift shows us in an instant the inanity of the objections raised by an evil spirit, so wholly different from the spirit of God. Error then creates the impression of a false discordant note in a symphony; though unable to refute it theologically, we see that it is an error. Likewise the gift of understanding emphasizes the immense distance separating spiritual realities from sensible symbols, or the spirit from the flesh.²¹⁰⁰ Similarly it dispels the confusion between sensible consolations and spiritual tastes, which are far more elevated and more sure, as St. Teresa pointed out.²¹⁰¹

Not only does the gift of understanding remove error, but it positively makes man penetrate vitally the truths of religion which are accessible to reason, such as the existence of God, the sovereign freedom of the Creator, and His providence;²¹⁰² but principally it makes him penetrate the meaning of the supernatural mysteries inaccessible to reason, what St. Paul calls “the deep things of God.”²¹⁰³ It cannot give us here on earth the evidence of these mysteries, but, in the obscurity of faith, it manifests to us their deep meaning, so difficult to express in human speech. It thus shows us the majesty of God, of His wisdom, justice, power, and paternity in relation the Word and to us. It gives us, for example, a more profound understanding of the mystery of the redemption by making us understand St. Paul’s words: “Christ Jesus... emptied Himself... He humbled Himself, becoming obedient unto death, even to the death of the cross.”²¹⁰⁴

The gift of understanding is thus both speculative and practical as St. Thomas says.²¹⁰⁵ It reminds us of the sovereign importance of the precept of love. In times of strong temptation, for example, to discouragement or even despair, it shows us as it were in a lightning flash the value of eternal life, the loftiness of our last end.²¹⁰⁶ Thus by the penetration it brings, this gift removes dullness of mind;²¹⁰⁷ it shows us our culpability far better than the most attentive examination of conscience; it reveals to us our indigence, our poverty, our wretchedness, and by contrast the eminence of God.

Therefore we see how, as St. Augustine and St. Thomas say, it corresponds to the beatitude: “Blessed are the clean of heart.” In fact, it purifies our intellect of speculative and practical errors, of attachment to sensible images; it makes us perceive,

though indistinctly, that God is infinitely superior to all created goods, that the Deity or divine essence, which the blessed contemplate immediately, is superior to all the analogical ideas that we can form of it.²¹⁰⁸ We thus perceive that the Deity, which will appear unveiled only in heaven, is to our ideas of the divine perfections somewhat as white light is to the seven colors of the rainbow which come from it. A man who has never seen whiteness, but only the colors which come from it, cannot say positively what white is. Just so, we cannot say what the inner life of God is. “*Nescimus de Deo quid est,*” St. Thomas often says. The Deity as such, in which we share only by grace, is superior to all the naturally knowable and participable perfections which it contains formally and eminently; it is superior to being, to unity, to truth, to goodness, to understanding, to love.²¹⁰⁹ It is the Deity, which we cannot know in its essence as long as we are on earth; that is why great mystics, like Angela of Foligno, have called it “the great darkness.”²¹¹⁰ But this great darkness is nothing else than the transluminous obscurity, or, as St. Paul says, “the light inaccessible”²¹¹¹ in which God dwells.

Thus we see why the purifying light of the gift of understanding gives the impression of darkness; it makes us enter on a higher plane into the obscurity of the supernatural, the divine mystery, which is the direct opposite of the obscurity on the lower plane on which we are affected by the condition of material things, by inordinate passions, by sin and error.

We can also understand why St. Thomas tells us that the gift of understanding confirms the supernatural certitude of faith by making us penetrate mysteries and by dispelling error.²¹¹² Thus contemplation, which exists in the state of darkness we are speaking of, proceeds from living faith as from its radical principle, and from the gift of understanding as from its proximate principle. The gift of knowledge also often concurs in it by revealing to us more in detail our poverty, culpability, and wretchedness.²¹¹³

The spiritual aridity found in this state shows that the gift of wisdom does not exert a notable influence in it, for this gift makes us relish divine things and thus brings us great spiritual consolation and profound peace.²¹¹⁴

The penetration, which, in this state, comes from the gift of understanding, differs from this relish of the divine mysteries. The proof of it is that he who in this way penetrates or comprehends increasingly the majesty of God, feels that he is alienated from Him because of the contrast between God’s majesty and his own indigence.²¹¹⁵ Later, at the end of the purification of the spirit, he will taste profoundly the presence of the Blessed Trinity in his soul, he will have a quasi-experimental knowledge of it, which was, as it were, sketched before the night of the spirit, and which, after this night, will appear in its plenitude in the transforming union.

St. John of the Cross describes the passive purification of the spirit as it is realized in great saints, but, all proportion being kept it should exist in every servant of God that his higher faculties may be truly purified to their depths, either on earth or after death in purgatory, since nothing unclean can enter heaven. Moreover, the proximate principle of this purification, the penetrating light of the gift of understanding, exists in all the just. For this reason Christ says to all: “Blessed are your eyes, because they see, and your ears, because they hear,” that you may grasp the spirit under the letter, the divine reality under figures, symbols, or parables. Blessed are they who thus distinguish between the spirit of God and a human wisdom that would lead them astray.

It remains for us to explain more fully the reasons why the purifying light of the gift of understanding creates the impression of darkness during the passive purification of the spirit. We shall thus see more clearly how this higher obscurity differs from the lower. In many supernatural facts more or less disconcerting to human reason, such as the passion of Christ, there is an enigma in which some are inclined to see darkness from the lower level of their illusions and pride; others discover the darkness from the higher level, that of God’s inner life and of the mysteries of His grace. We need only recall the first controversies over the apparitions of Our Lady of Lourdes to Bernadette. The confusion of these two darknesses is that of two extremes infinitely distant one from the other, between which we have to walk. More than that, we must continually lift ourselves out of the darkness of the lower plane to penetrate more and more into the darkness of that higher plane, which is the inaccessible light in which God dwells. The night of the Spirit thus appears as the normal prelude of eternal life and as its painful germination in us.²¹¹⁶

The Transluminous Obscurity

We have seen that the spiritual light of the gift of understanding, which is given to the soul in the passive purification of the spirit, enlightens it regarding the infinite majesty of God on the one hand, and, by contrast, regarding its own poverty and wretchedness.

Our problem now is why this infused purifying light manifests itself as darkness. Why does it give the impression of a great darkness and why does it at times cause great suffering?

There are three reasons for it, which are pointed out by St. John of the Cross and more readily understood with the help of the theology of St. Thomas Aquinas. A great light gives the impression of darkness because of its very strength and of the elevation of its object. Moreover, it makes us suffer because of our impurity and weakness, which we feel more keenly under certain temptations of the devil that occur in this period.

THE EFFECT OF TOO GREAT A LIGHT

First of all, St. John of the Cross, following Dionysius and the great theologians, says: "The divine wisdom is so high that it transcends the capacity of the soul, and therefore is, in that respect, darkness,"²¹¹⁷ because we comprehend with increasing clarity that the divine Essence or the Deity surpasses all the ideas we can have of it, ideas of being, truth, goodness, intelligence, and love; it contains them all in an eminence inaccessible to us, which essentially is sovereignly luminous, but which seems dark to us because we cannot attain it.²¹¹⁸ This "inaccessible light"²¹¹⁹ in which God dwells is for us the great darkness. Thus the light of the sun seems dark to the eye of the owl, which can bear and attain only the dim light of twilight or dawn. Aristotle pointed this out,²¹²⁰ and Dionysius the Mystic likewise says that contemplation is like "a ray of darkness."

Consequently what seems clear to us in God, as His existence and the existence of His providence, is what we grasp of it in the mirror of sensible things, in the dim light within our reach. But the intimate harmonization of infinite justice, infinite mercy, and supreme liberty in the mystery of predestination seems very obscure to us, although this intimate harmonization may be intrinsically very luminous. Souls passing through the dark night of the spirit are consequently often tempted on the subject of the mystery of predestination; and in this trial they cannot dwell on the excessively human and seemingly clearer conceptions of this mystery.²¹²¹ They would feel as if they were descending instead of ascending. They must rise above the temptation by turning, through a great act of faith, toward the superior obscurity of the intimate life of God, of the Deity, in which harmonize infinite justice, infinite mercy, and the supreme liberty of the Most High.

The Blessed Trinity also, which is Light itself, seems obscure to us because too luminous for the weak eyes of our spirit. For this reason St. Teresa says: "I have more devotion to the mysteries of faith in proportion as they are more obscure; because I know that this obscurity comes from a light too great for our weak understanding." Christ's passion, which was the darkest and most disconcerting period for the apostles, was that of Christ's greatest victory over sin and the devil.²¹²²

THE EFFECT OF LIGHT ON WEAK EYES

Furthermore, the divine light, given in the night of the spirit, causes suffering because of the impurity still existing in the soul. St. Augustine pointed this out, saying: "The light which so greatly pleases pure eyes is hateful to weak ones." This is so much truer when this divine light must overcome a special resistance of the soul, which is unwilling to be enlightened in regard to certain of its defects, wishing at times to see virtues in them: for example, in regard to a somewhat bitter zeal and a secret complacency, as a result of which it is deceived by its self-love and by the enemy of the good. "The light shineth in darkness," says St. John, "and the [inferior] darkness did not comprehend it."²¹²³ This light seems painful when it must overcome resistance, especially a prolonged resistance.

It even happens often that the soul suffers greatly because it cannot understand why God tries it in this way, as if He were an implacable judge. As a result, it has difficulty in believing practically in His goodness; and when someone speaks of the goodness of God, it seems abstract and theoretical to the soul at a time when in its opinion it needs to experience this goodness by a little consolation.²¹²⁴

THE FEAR OF CONSENTING OR OF HAVING CONSENTED TO TEMPTATIONS

This interior suffering increases still more through the fear of consenting to temptations arising at this time against faith, hope, and the love of God and of neighbor. Holy Job experienced this fear, and so did the apostles during the Passion and after the Ascension, when Christ had departed from them and left them alone.

In this painful state, the soul sees clearly that at times it resists these temptations, but at others it fears that it consented. This fear causes it anguish, for in this state the soul already greatly loves the Lord and would not for anything in the world offend His majesty or slight His goodness.²¹²⁵

We have here the explanation of the fact that, whereas at the summit of the spirit there is an act of faith illumined by the gift of understanding, a direct and very simple, though unperceived, act of arid contemplation, at the same time the just man is inclined by his lower reason to conclude that he is abandoned by God. This was the case with St. Paul of the Cross when he exclaimed in the streets of Rome: “*A via Pauli, libera nos Domine*”; also with St. Alphonsus Liguori, who believed that the Order which he had founded was going to perish; with Father Surin in his desolations, from which he emerged occasionally to preach, out of charity, an admirable sermon springing from the depths of his tormented faith, which was daily growing in this struggle. At this stage there is in tried souls, as in those of purgatory, a flux and reflux; carried toward God by the impulse of their love, they feel themselves repulsed by all the wretchedness and pusillanimity which they see in themselves.

As a rule, the director can bring no consolation to the soul thus afflicted, says St. John of the Cross.²¹²⁶ He speaks to it of the glorious end of this trial, of the soft light that will be met with again on leaving this tunnel, but the soul, immersed in suffering, cannot understand these words. It cannot receive consolation by this human and discursive way, but only through a special inspiration of the Holy Ghost and through very simple direct acts which He excites in it. For this reason Father de Caussade says with his usual charm: “Souls walking in the light sing hymns of light; those walking in the darkness sing canticles of darkness. We must let both classes sing even to the end the part and the motet that God assigns to them. We must put nothing into what He is filling; we must let all the drops of this gall of divine bitterness flow, though it should inebriate. Jeremias and Ezechiel acted in this manner.... The spirit which renders desolate, alone can console. These different waters flow from the same source.”²¹²⁷

Scripture states several times: “The Lord... bringeth down to hell and bringeth back again. The Lord maketh poor and maketh rich, He humbleth and He exalteth.”²¹²⁸ This statement is verified especially in the night of the spirit, which is the mystical death; it prepares the soul for the intimacy of union with God. The soul empty of all self-love can reach absolute sincerity; every mask drops away. The soul no longer possesses anything of its own, but is ready to possess God, like the apostles, of whom it was said: “As having nothing, and possessing all things.”²¹²⁹ The emptiness that it experiences renders it still more eager for God.

CONFIRMATIONS

The doctrine just set forth is confirmed in several ways. First of all, it is confirmed by the dogma of purgatory. Nothing unclean can enter heaven; therefore the purification of the spirit, which we are speaking of, must be undergone before or after death. However it is far better and more profitable to undergo it before death; for in the present life man merits while growing in charity, whereas in purgatory he no longer merits. It is far better to be purified by the spiritual fire of growing infused love than by another inferior fire. In this connection, it will be profitable to read what St. Catherine of Genoa says in her *Treatise on Purgatory* about the purification in the next world.

St. John of the Cross points out an additional confirmation: “For the light of God that illumines an angel enlightens him and sets him on fire with love, for he is a spirit already prepared for the infusion of that light; but man, being impure and weak, is ordinarily enlightened... in darkness, in distress, and pain—the sun’s rays are painful in their light to weak eyes.”²¹³⁰

When we receive this divine illumination, we are not as a rule conscious that God is enlightening us; nevertheless, some words of the Gospel on mercy or justice are illumined for us. This is a sign that we have received a grace of light.

We find a third confirmation of what we have said in the analogy of night in nature, a symbol that enables us to understand a little the state of purification, called the night of the spirit. In nature, when the sun goes down and night falls, we no longer see the objects surrounding us, but we do see distant objects not visible during the day, such as the stars, which are thousands of leagues away. And the sun must hide that we may see them, that we may be able to glimpse the depths of the firmament. Analogously, during the night of the spirit we see much farther than during the luminous period preceding it; these inferior lights must be taken away from us in order that we may begin to see the heights of the spiritual firmament.²¹³¹ This is why Christ said to His apostles: “It is expedient to you that I go. For if I go not, the Paraclete will not come to you; but if I go, I will send Him to you.”²¹³² As a matter of fact, when the apostles could no longer see Christ’s humanity, they began to glimpse the grandeur of His divinity. They were so well enlightened and fortified that on Pentecost the Apostle Peter preached to all who were in the temple at Jerusalem, saying: “But the Author of life you killed, whom God hath raised from the dead, of which we are witnesses.”²¹³³ “Neither is there salvation in any other. For there is no other name under heaven given to men, whereby We

must be saved.”²¹³⁴ Peter’s preaching sprang from the plenitude of the contemplation of the mystery of Christ. St. Thomas says it must be so in order that preaching may be living and profound,²¹³⁵ a condition that is fully realized only after the purification of the spirit.

What St. John of the Cross says, Tauler has pointed out several times in his sermons, for example, in the sermon for the Second Sunday of Lent.²¹³⁶ According to Tauler, the tried soul, which at first seems to pray in vain, like the woman of Canaan, is, however, as if pursued by God:

This divine pursuit provokes in the soul an appealing cry of immense force;... it is a sigh coming from a measureless depth. This desire of the soul far exceeds nature; it is the Holy Ghost Himself who must utter this sigh in us, as St. Paul says: “The Spirit Himself asketh for us with unspeakable groanings.”... But God acts then as if He heard absolutely nothing,... as Christ seemed at first not to wish to hear the prayer of the woman of Canaan, saying to her: “I was not sent but to the sheep that are lost of the house of Israel.... It is not good to take the bread of the children and to cast it to the dogs.”... Humbling herself then she replied with great confidence: “Yea, Lord; for the whelps also eat of the crumbs that fall from the table of their master.”... That ‘s why Jesus answered her: “O woman, great is thy faith: be it done to thee as thou wilt.” In truth, this is the answer that will be made to all those who will be found in such dispositions (of profound humility and confidence) on this road. All that you wish will happen to you and in the way you wish it, for “in the measure in which you have gone forth from what is yours,” says the Lord, “in this measure you are to share in what is Mine.”... In proportion as a man renounces himself and goes out of himself, in the same proportion God enters into him in very truth.... Take the last place, as the Gospel says, and you will be lifted up. But those who exalt themselves will be put down. Desire only what God has willed from all eternity; accept the place which in His most amiable will He has decided should be yours. My children, it is by complete renunciation of self and of all that one possesses that one goes to God. One drop of this renunciation, one rill of it, would better prepare a man and lead him nearer to God than the most absolute exterior denudation.... A short moment lived in these dispositions would be more useful for us than forty years following practices of our own choice.

In this sermon Tauler speaks forcibly of the one thing necessary. The grace of denudation in question here fulfills profoundly the words of the Gospel: “Unless the grain of wheat falling into the ground die, itself remaineth alone. But if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit.”²¹³⁷ Blessed is the death that is followed by such a spiritual resurrection.²¹³⁸

Conduct to Be Observed during the Purification of the Spirit

After describing the period of passive purification that should introduce the soul into the unitive way of the perfect, we explained this purification by the purifying light, which is chiefly that of the gift of understanding, in which we contemplate the majesty of God and our poverty, not to mention our wretchedness. We shall now give rules of direction for souls in this state of prolonged aridity, which is sometimes so painful.

GENEROUS ACCEPTANCE

There is, first of all, a general rule. These afflicted souls should be treated with kindness and helped that they may be led to full conformity to the divine will. The first rule of direction is that these souls should accept this trial generously for as long a time as, according to the good pleasure of God, it may last, and they should live in abandonment to the divine will. Moreover, as a general rule, the more generously they accept this purification, the quicker it will end, since the effect for which God wills it, will be more promptly accomplished. If it is more intense, it will generally be shorter (like the purification of purgatory) unless the soul is to suffer specially for sinners, over and above its personal purification.

Excellent books have been written on abandonment to Providence in this period of the spiritual life. Besides *The Dark Night* (Bk. II) of St. John of the Cross, there is the *Treatise on The Love of God* (Bk. IX) of St. Francis de Sales on the love of submission and of holy indifference in spiritual afflictions.²¹³⁹ In the seventeenth century, Father A. Piny, O.P., wrote *Le plus parfait*, or the way of abandonment to the will of God, and also *L'Etat du pur amour*. In the same period we find *Les saintes voies de la croix* by the Venerable Henry Mary Boudon; in the eighteenth century, *Abandonment to Divine Providence* by Father de Caussade, S.J.; and recently (1919), *Le saint abandon* by Dom Vitalis Lehodey, O.C.R.

In this question of abandonment, two dangers must be avoided: quietism and the opposing error. Quietism or semi-quietism denies the necessity of our cooperation and goes so far as to demand in these trials the sacrifice of our hope or desire of salvation.²¹⁴⁰ On the contrary, we must in this case, as St. Paul says: "Against hope believe in hope."²¹⁴¹

The contrary error would consist in exaggerating the necessity of our cooperation while diminishing that of prayer and disregarding the efficacy of our petitions and the conduct of Providence which directs all. It would amount to a sort of practical naturalism. Tried souls should, on the contrary, pray particularly, ask the help of God to persevere in faith, trust, and love. They must be told that, if they continue to pray in this severe trial, it is a sign that, in spite of appearances, their prayer is granted; for no one can continue to pray without a new actual grace. And God who, from all eternity, has foreseen and willed our prayers, excites them in us.

To this general rule of the generous acceptance of the trial in conformity with the divine will, must be added three special rules relating to the three theological virtues, by which especially one must live during the night of the spirit. Here more particularly is verified the expression: "The just man liveth by faith."²¹⁴² The night of the spirit is that of faith whose object is obscure mysteries which appear so much the more obscure in proportion as they are higher above the senses. St. Thomas often says: "Fides est de non visis," the object of faith is things not seen. One does not believe on testimony what one sees.

FAITH IN THE MYSTERY OF THE CROSS

In the trial of which we are speaking, the soul must, therefore firmly believe in what God has told of the great efficacy of the purifying cross in the life of the Church and in its own personal spiritual life. That this faith may be practical, it must tell itself that the cross is necessary and good for it. St. Louis Bertrand, during this period of his life, used often to repeat the words of St. Augustine: "Lord, burn, cut, do not spare now, that in eternity Thou mayest spare." The soul must believe that it is good for it to be thus painfully purified, that this purification is one of the distinctive signs of the children of God, and that this profound and painful purification glorifies the Lord. It must be penetrated with St. Paul's words: "We have this treasure [of divine grace] in earthen vessels, that the excellency [of the Gospel] may be of the power of God, and not of us. In all things we suffer tribulation, but are not distressed; we are straitened, but are not destitute; we suffer persecution, but are not forsaken; we are cast down, but we perish not: always bearing about in our body the mortification of Jesus, that the life also of Jesus may be made manifest in our bodies."²¹⁴³ "Power is made perfect in infirmity. Gladly therefore will I glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may dwell in me."²¹⁴⁴ "Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and so to enter into His glory?"²¹⁴⁵ "We are the sons of God. And if sons, heirs also; heirs indeed of God and joint heirs with Christ: yet so, if we suffer with Him, that

we may be also glorified with Him.”²¹⁴⁶

As sanctifying grace is a participation in the divine nature and makes us like to God, habitual grace, as Christian and as coming from Christ crucified, configures us to Him and prepares us to carry our cross in imitation of Him. In this sense it adds a special modality to sanctifying grace as it was on the first day of creation in the angels and in Adam in the state of innocence. St. Thomas points this out in treating of baptismal grace.²¹⁴⁷

Thus we know the mystery of the redemption in a more living, profound, and quasi-experiential manner. We then comprehend how greatly deceived were the Jews who said to our Lord: “If Thou be the Son of God, come down from the cross.”²¹⁴⁸ They should have said, on the contrary, as did the centurion on witnessing the death of our Savior: “Indeed this man was the Son of God.”²¹⁴⁹ Christ never appeared greater than during His passion, when He said: “My kingdom is not of this world.”²¹⁵⁰ “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.”²¹⁵¹ “It is consummated.”²¹⁵² Christ’s victory over sin and the devil on Good Friday is far greater than the victory He won over death by His resurrection. The resurrection of His body is only a sign of the power He has to restore life to souls, to forgive them their sins.

The cross is thus a distinctive sign of the Christian who is configured to his Savior. Therefore, as a rule, among the signs of predestination are named: patience in adversity for the love of God, love of enemies in spite of their insults and calumnies, love of the poor, especially when personal affliction supernaturally inclines us to help them. “Because I am not unacquainted with evil things. I know how to commiserate the wretched.”

The soul that is in the night of the spirit should, therefore, often contemplate the passion of Christ, following the example of the saints, and ask for light to have a more profound understanding of the holy humiliations of our Savior and of their infinite redemptive value.

FIRM HOPE AND CONSTANT PRAYER

During this painful purification, the soul should also, the quietists to the contrary notwithstanding, hope against all human hope, asking unceasingly for the help of God. Abraham acted thus when God tried him by asking for the immolation of his son.²¹⁵³ It may seem to it at first that God does not hear it, as was the case with the woman of Canaan; but He wishes in this way to try the confidence of the soul and at the same time, if it asks Him, He gives it the grace to continue to pray. This grace is itself a sign that He grants the prayer of the soul.

The soul must also recommend itself to the saints that they may intercede for it, especially those who were particularly tried in this manner, such as St. John of the Cross, St. Paul of the Cross, St. Benedict Joseph Labre, and the holy Cure of Ars.

It should pray in the manner used in the liturgy, the elevation of which then appears increasingly clear to those who bear this trial well. “O Lord, deliver my soul. The Lord is merciful and just, and our God showeth mercy.”²¹⁵⁴ “The Lord ruleth me: and I shall want nothing.... He hath led me on the paths of justice, for His own name’s sake. For though I should walk in the midst of the shadow of death, I will fear no evils, for Thou art with me. Thy rod and Thy staff, they have comforted me.”²¹⁵⁵ “Deliver me, O Lord, and set me beside Thee, and let any man’s hand fight against me.”²¹⁵⁶ Christ said: “He that followeth Me, walketh not in darkness, but shall have the light of life.”²¹⁵⁷

That hope may be strengthened in the soul, it is also well in this state to meditate on the canticle in Compline for Lent, which used to make St. Thomas Aquinas weep: “In the midst of life, we are in death. Whom seek we as a protector, except Thou, O Lord, who art justly angered by our sins. Holy God, holy Strong One, holy and merciful Savior, deliver us not up to the bitterness of death. Abandon us not in our old age, nor when our strength will fall us, holy God; holy and strong, holy and merciful” Such is the prayer the soul should make in the night of the spirit; it enables the soul to glimpse all the mystical grandeur of the liturgy.

When we pray in this manner, hope is purified and strengthened in the soul; far from sacrificing the desire for its salvation, as the quietists advised, the soul should desire God more and more purely and strongly. True, this desire should not subordinate God to the soul like a fruit necessary to its subsistence, but it should desire to possess God, its supreme Good, in order to glorify Him eternally.²¹⁵⁸

THE LOVE OF CONFORMITY AND OF SUBMISSION TO GOD’S GOOD PLEASURE

Lastly, in this state of trial, the soul should, as St. Francis de Sales well shows,²¹⁵⁹ be penetrated with Christ’s words: “My meat is to do the will of Him that sent Me.”²¹⁶⁰ In spiritual tribulations and afflictions, the soul should nourish itself with the will of God so that self-love may die definitively in it, that the soul may be truly stripped of self-love, and that the reign of the divine will may be established in the depths of its will. The soul will obtain this grace if it accepts, for love of God, to do and suffer all that He wishes, as obedience, circumstances, and the interior light of the Holy Ghost may indicate.

Consequently the soul should be penetrated with the evangelical beatitudes: blessed are the poor in spirit, the meek, those

who shed the tears of contrition; those who hunger and thirst after justice and preserve this zeal in spite of all difficulties; blessed, too, are the merciful, the clean of heart, the peacemakers; blessed are they who suffer persecution for justice, when they are insulted and persecuted because of the Savior. Their reward is great in heaven, and even on earth they will receive the hundredfold of all that has been taken from them; they will receive it especially in close union with God and in working for the salvation of their neighbor.

Souls that pass through this denudation and are calumniated ought often to reread what St. Paul says to the Romans: “If God be for us, who is against us?... Christ Jesus... maketh intercession for us.. Who then shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or persecution, or the sword?... But in all these things we overcome, because of Him that hath loved us. For I am sure that neither death nor life nor angels nor principalities nor powers nor things present nor things to come nor might nor height nor depth nor any other creature shall be able to separate us from the love of God,”²¹⁶¹ nor be able to make God abandon the just, if they do not abandon Him first.

In this period of purification, one should ask our Lord for the love of the cross, for the desire to share in His holy humiliations in the measure willed by Providence. The soul should ask Him also to let it find in this desire the strength to bear whatever may come, the peace, and sometimes the joy, to restore its courage and that of souls that come to it.²¹⁶² Then this trial, hard as it may be at times, will seem good to it; at least the soul will believe that it is salutary and sanctifying for it.

Then it will more readily grasp the great meaning of the words of *The Imitation* on the royal road of the cross: “In the cross is salvation; in the cross is life; in the cross is protection from enemies. In the cross is infusion of heavenly sweetness; in the cross is strength of mind; in the cross is joy of spirit; in the cross is height of virtue; in the cross is perfection of sanctity.... No man hath so heartfelt a sense of the Passion of Christ as he whose lot it hath been to suffer like things.... If thou carry the cross willingly, it will carry thee.... If thou carry it unwillingly, thou makest it a burden to thee, and loadest thyself the more.... For the sufferings of this life are not worthy to be compared with the glory to come.”²¹⁶³

The painful purification we are speaking of creates a great void in the soul by driving out self-love and pride, and gives it an increasingly eager desire for God. St. Francis de Sales explains this effect, saying:

As man can be perfected only by the divine goodness, so the divine goodness can scarcely so well exercise its perfection outside itself as upon our humanity. The one has great need and capacity to receive good, the other great abundance and inclination to bestow it. Nothing is so suitable to indigence as a liberal abundance; nothing so agreeable to a liberal abundance as extreme indigence.... The more needy the indigent man is, the more eager he is to receive, as a vacuum is to be filled. Therefore the meeting of abundance and indigence is sweet and desirable; and if our Lord had not said that it is better to give than to receive, one could hardly say which has greater contentment, abundant good in diffusing and communicating itself or failing and indigent good in receiving.... Divine goodness has, therefore, more pleasure in giving its graces than we in receiving them.²¹⁶⁴

The void created in the soul that is stripped of self-love and pride causes it to become, therefore, increasingly capable of receiving divine grace, the abundance of charity. In this sense the Apostle says: “God... giveth grace to the humble,” and He makes them humble in order to fill them to overflowing.

All we have just said shows the profound truth of St. Thomas’ words: “The love of God is unitive (*congregativus*), inasmuch as it draws man’s affections from the many to the one; so that the virtues, which flow from the love of God, are connected together. But self-love disunites (*disgregat*) man’s affections among different things, so far as man loves himself, by desiring for himself temporal goods, which are various and of many kinds.”²¹⁶⁵ The love of God causes the light of reason and that of grace to shine increasingly in us, whereas sin stains the soul, taking away from it the brilliance of the divine light.²¹⁶⁶ The purification of the spirit removes these stains, which are in our higher faculties, that they may be resplendent with the true light, which is the prelude of that of eternity.

The Effects of the Passive Purification of the Spirit in Relation Especially to the Three Theological Virtues

Having described and explained the passive purification of the spirit and pointed out the rules of direction which should be followed, we shall now set forth its effects on the soul when borne with generosity.

These effects show the end for which God thus purifies His servants. He does so that the higher part of the soul may be supernaturalized and prepared for divine union, as the sensible part must be spiritualized or wholly subjected to the spirit. Among these effects some are negative, consisting in the suppression of defects; others are positive and are profound especially in the perfection they give to the virtues in the elevated part of the soul, principally humility and the theological virtues.

NEGATIVE EFFECTS

These effects are visible in the progressive disappearance of distractions, dullness of spirit, and the need of external dissipation or of finding consolation. Self-love or subtle egoism gradually disappears. The result is that the soul is less subject to illusions, for it lives increasingly by its higher part, into which the enemy cannot penetrate. God alone penetrates the innermost depths of the heart and spirit. Doubtless the devil still multiplies his temptations, but if the soul takes refuge in its center, where God dwells, the enemy cannot harm it and even cannot know but can only conjecture what is taking place in it; the intimate secrets of hearts escape him.²¹⁶⁷

This purification removes many other defects in our relations with our neighbor or in respect to our duties of state: a certain natural rudeness, which leads to impatience; an a most unconscious secret ambition, the cause of many disorders and divisions among people; and also a lack of interest in the occasionally great needs of our afflicted neighbor who turns to us for help. It is in this state that those who have the duty of caring devotedly for others, possess a deeper understanding of Christ's words: "The good shepherd giveth his life for his sheep. But the hireling, and he that is not the shepherd, whose own the sheep are not, seeth the wolf coming and leaveth the sheep and flieth; and the wolf catcheth and scattereth the sheep."²¹⁶⁸ To profit by these words, we should ask the Lord to give us an increase of true zeal, the patient, gentle, disinterested zeal which draws life from God to give it in greater measure to our neighbor.

In connection with this subject, it should be noted that there are also at times collective purifications, like persecutions, from which the soul must know how to draw profit. On such occasions the heroic degree of the virtues becomes necessary; one is in the happy necessity of becoming a saint in order not to be lost. Those who seem fairly good in prosperity are often weak and cowardly in these great difficulties; others, on the contrary, reveal their true character on these occasions. These grave moments should lead us to make the following salutary reflection: true sanctity does not require a lesser purification in outwardly calm periods than in periods troubled by persecution. The saints who lived in the calmest periods of the life of the Church had their interior trials, without which their souls would not have attained to the perfect purity which God willed to see in them.

In no period, however calm it may be, can anyone become a saint without carrying his cross, without being configured to Christ crucified. In troubled times, however, man often faces the urgent necessity of sanctifying himself completely in order not to lose his soul; he must then be heroically faithful in order not to fall back. In other calmer periods, this urgent necessity does not make itself thus felt, but even then, carrying his cross he must follow our Lord. Nothing unclean can enter heaven; one must be purified either before death, like the martyrs, or after it, like the souls in purgatory.

Lastly, there are other collective trials which demand great uprightness of will: for example, when in the society in which we live some exceptional event occurs that obliges us, though at the cost of great sacrifices, to declare ourselves for God. Such events are visits from the Lord; in them are distinguished His true servants, who, instead of being merely good, must become excellent. With this meaning, the aged Simeon said of the coming of the Child Jesus into the world: "Behold this Child is set for the fall and for the resurrection of many in Israel, and for a sign which shall be contradicted;... that out of many hearts thoughts may be revealed."²¹⁶⁹ In other words, Christ, who had come for the salvation of all, was to be an occasion of fall for many. Refusing to recognize the Savior in Him, they have fallen into infidelity. Thus the secret thoughts of the Pharisees were revealed, whereas they would have remained partly hidden had the Pharisees lived two centuries earlier. Something similar occurs when there is a great supernatural event, like the apparitions of the Blessed Virgin at Lourdes, an event about which the

good and the bad are divided. There is, as Pascal says, sufficient light for those who wish to see and sufficient obscurity for those who do not wish to see. These great events, persecutions, or exceptional visits of the Lord, on the occasion of which the good and the tepid are profoundly divided, throw light on what we are saying here of the passive purification of the soul. In periods when the life of society is not marked by anything exceptionally bad or good, no less a purification is needed to reach sanctity than in periods of social upheaval.

In regard to the visits of the Lord, we must also remember that they often differ appreciably. There are visits of consolation, like the apparitions of Lourdes; but if people do not profit by them, the Lord comes to chastise; and if they do not profit by this divine correction, He may come to condemn.²¹⁷⁰

All that we have said shows what profit we should reap from the trials which the Lord sends us, particularly in this prolonged period of spiritual aridity of which we are speaking. If we bear it generously, many defects, which arrest the growth of the divine life in us, will be uprooted forever. Conquered self-love will then give place to the true love of God, to zeal for His glory and the salvation of souls.

THE POSITIVE EFFECTS OF THIS PURIFICATION

The positive effects of the dark night of the soul consist chiefly in a great increase in the virtues of the elevated part of the soul, principally in humility, piety, and the theological virtues. These higher virtues come forth greatly purified from all human alloy, in the sense that their formal supernatural motive is brought into strong relief above every secondary or accessory motive which sometimes leads man to practice them in too human a manner.²¹⁷¹ At this stage especially the formal motive of each of the three theological virtues stands out with increasing clearness: namely, the first revealing truth, the motive of faith; helpful omnipotence, the motive of hope; the divine goodness infinitely more lovable in itself than every created gift, the motive of charity.

But there is first a similar purification of humility. Humility is commonly said to be the fundamental virtue which removes pride, the source of every sin. St. Augustine and St. Thomas for this reason compare it to the excavation that must be dug for the construction of a building, an excavation that needs to be so much deeper as the building is to be higher. Consequently, to deepen humility it does not suffice to scratch the soil a little, it is not sufficient that we ourselves dig, as we do in a thorough examination of conscience. To drive out pride, the Lord Himself must intervene through the special inspirations of the gifts of knowledge and understanding. He then shows the soul the hitherto unsuspected degree of its profound indigence and wretchedness and throws light on the hidden folds of conscience in which lie the seeds of death. Thus a ray of sunlight shining into a dark room shows all the dust, held in suspension in the air and previously imperceptible. Under the purifying divine light, as under a powerful projector, the soul sees in itself a multitude of defects it had never noticed; confounded by the sight, it cannot bear this light. It sees at times that by its repeated sins it has placed itself in a miserable state, a state of abjection. St. Paul, strongly tempted, felt his frailty keenly. Blessed Angela of Foligno seemed to herself an abyss of sin and wished to declare her state to everyone. St. Benedict Joseph Labre one day began his confession by saying: "Have pity on me, Father, I am a great sinner." The confessor, finding nothing seriously reprehensible in his accusation, said to him: "I see that you do not know how to go to confession." He then questioned the saint on the grossest sins, but obtained such humble answers so full of the spirit of faith, that he understood that his penitent, who confessed in this manner, was a saint.

Such is indeed the purification of humility, which is no longer only exterior, no longer the pouting or sad humility of one who holds aloof because people do not approve of him. It becomes true humility of heart, which loves to be nothing that God may be all; it bows profoundly before the infinite majesty of the Most High and before what is divine in every creature.

This true humility then reveals to us the profound meaning of Christ's words: "Without Me you can do nothing." It enables us to understand far better what St. Paul says: "What hast thou that thou hast not received? And if thou hast received, why dost thou glory, as if thou hadst not received it?"²¹⁷² The soul then recognizes experimentally that by its natural powers alone it is absolutely incapable of the least salutary and meritorious supernatural act. It sees the grandeur of the doctrine of the Church which teaches, against semi-Pelagianism, that the beginning of salvation, the beginning of salutary good will, can come only from grace, and that man needs a special gift to persevere to the end. The soul thus purified sees why, according to St. Augustine, St. Thomas, and their disciples, grace is efficacious of itself; far from being rendered efficacious by our good consent, it is grace that gives rise to our consent, it is truly "God who worketh in you, both to will and to accomplish," as St. Paul says.²¹⁷³ In this period of painful purification, at grips with strong temptations to discouragement, the soul indeed needs to believe in this divine efficacy of grace, which lifts up the weak man, makes him fulfill the precepts, and transforms him.²¹⁷⁴

Thus humility grows, according to the seven degrees enumerated by St. Anselm: "(1) to acknowledge ourselves contemptible; (2) to grieve on account of this; (3) to admit that we are so; (4) to wish our neighbor to believe it; (5) to endure with patience people saying it; (6) to be willing to be treated as a person worthy of contempt; (7) to love to be treated in this way,"²¹⁷⁵ and, like St. Francis of Assisi, to find a holy joy in this treatment. This is, in fact, heroic humility. Such virtue

presupposes a special inspiration of the Holy Ghost and the passive purification of the spirit. Besides, it is clearly in the normal way of sanctity; full Christian perfection cannot exist without it. As a matter of fact, all the saints possessed great humility; it presupposes the contemplation of two great truths: we have been created out of nothing by God, who freely preserves us in existence; and without the help of His grace we could not perform any salutary and meritorious act.

The soul then attains a quasi-experiential knowledge of the gratuity and efficacy of grace, without which it would not advance, but would certainly fall back. Humility thus purified tells the glory of God more than do the stars in the heavens.

In this stage there is a similar purification of true piety, or the virtue of religion toward God. Substantial devotion, the promptness of the will in the service of the Lord, should, in fact, subsist here in spite of the absence of sensible devotion and spiritual consolation over a period of months and sometimes of years. The inspirations of the gift of piety then come greatly to the aid of the virtue of religion, bestowing on the soul perseverance in prayer in spite of the greatest spiritual aridity.²¹⁷⁶ The fruit of this deep piety is meekness, which corresponds, says St. Augustine, to the beatitude of the meek.

THE PURIFICATION OF FAITH

Just as our Lord Himself teaches His friends to become meek and humble of heart, He also purifies their faith from all alloy.²¹⁷⁷

Faith is an infused virtue by which we believe firmly all that God has revealed, because He has revealed it and as the Church proposes it. All the faithful doubtless believe in what God has revealed, but many live very little by the supernatural mysteries which are the principal object of faith. They think more often of the truths of religion that reason can attain—the existence of God, His Providence, the immortality of the soul—or they go no farther than the outward, sensible aspect of Christian worship. Often our faith is still too weak to make us truly live by the mysteries of the Blessed Trinity, the Incarnation, the redemption, the Eucharist, the indwelling of the Holy Ghost in our souls. These are holy formulas, often repeated with veneration, but they are pale and lifeless, and their object is, as it were, lost in the depths of the heavens. These supernatural mysteries have not sufficiently become for us the light of life, the orientation point of our judgments, the habitual norm of our thoughts.

Likewise, the motive for our belief in these mysteries is undoubtedly the fact that God has revealed them, but we dwell excessively on several secondary motives which aid us: first, these mysteries are the rather generally accepted belief of our family and our country; next, we see a certain harmony between supernatural dogmas and the natural truths accessible to reason; lastly, we have some slight experience of God's action in our souls, and this helps us to believe.

But let us suppose that God were suddenly to take away from us all these secondary motives which facilitate the act of faith and on which we perhaps dwell too much. Let us suppose that in spiritual aridity prolonged for months and years, we no longer experience in ourselves the consoling action of God and no longer see the harmony between supernatural mysteries and natural truths; then the act of faith will become difficult for us. This is true especially if the purifying divine light illumines in these mysteries what is loftiest and apparently least conformable to reason: for example, infinite justice on the one hand, and the gratuity of predestination on the other. Besides, in this trial the devil seeks to make our judgment deviate, to show us that there is severity in inexorable divine justice, as if the damned sought pardon without being able to obtain it, whereas in reality they never ask pardon. The enemy seeks also to make us interpret the judgments of the divine good pleasure as arbitrary, despotic, and capricious, adding that an infinitely good and omnipotent God could not permit all the evil that happens in the world; the evil spirit increases this evil in order to draw an additional objection from it. He sounds a false note to trouble the superior harmony of the mysteries of faith. At times he wishes to persuade the soul that there is nothing after death, and he puts forth every effort to give this negation the appearance of an icy evidence which imposes itself absolutely.²¹⁷⁸

The question may then be put under the form of a temptation against faith: Does the supernatural world exist? The soul finds itself between two opposing influences: that of the purifying divine light which casts the intellect into the unsuspected depths of mysteries, as if one were thrown into the sea before knowing how to swim; and on the other hand, the influence of the devil, who tries to cause the effect of the divine light to deviate.

In order to believe, there is left only this sole motive: God has revealed it; every secondary motive has momentarily disappeared. The soul should then ask for the actual grace that enables it to make the act of faith; the grace that makes it overcome, rise above the temptation, instead of reasoning against it; the grace that makes it adhere to the divine revealing Truth: to the authority of God revealing, above the excessively superficial and narrow conceptions it had of the divine perfections.²¹⁷⁹ Then the soul gradually "finds shelter in the immutable," in the first Truth, in the uncreated and revealing word, which makes it clearly understand that infinite justice is free from any cruelty, that it is identical in God with the most tender mercy. It also makes the soul see distinctly that, far from being capricious, the divine good pleasure is infinitely wise, and that the divine permission of the greatest evils is holy, for it has in view a higher good of which God alone is the judge and which the soul shall one day contemplate. This superior good is at times dimly seen on earth in the night of the spirit.²¹⁸⁰

Faith is then purified from all alloy and no longer dwells on secondary motives which facilitated its act; they have momentarily disappeared. It no longer dwells on the sensible aspect of the mysteries of the Incarnation, the redemption, the Eucharist; it enters into the depths of divine revelation.

Thus the faith of the apostles was purified during the painful trial of the Passion, in which Jesus, whom three of them had contemplated on Tabor, appeared humiliated and crushed. They had to believe that in spite of this annihilation He was the Son of God made flesh, who would rise on the third day. The Blessed Virgin, St. John, and Magdalen remained firm in faith on Calvary. Likewise after the Ascension, the apostles, henceforth deprived of the sight of the risen Christ, had to live in the obscurity of faith; from Pentecost on, they preached this faith with the most absolute certitude, even to martyrdom.

The saints have known the same kind of trials. St. Vincent de Paul was tormented for four years by a temptation against faith. For ten years Blessed Henry Suso had a similar temptation.

At the end of such a trial, faith is considerably increased, tenfold and even more. The night of the spirit then becomes a starlit night in which one sees dimly the depths of the firmament; that this might be so, the sun had to hide. To glimpse the splendor of supernatural mysteries, reason must have made its sacrifice; it must have renounced seeing by its own light, and must have humbly received the divine light. Similarly, if he is deeply Christian, a deposed king, like Louis XVI, glimpses at the moment of his trial the beauty of the kingdom of God, which is infinitely superior to every earthly kingdom.

At the end of this purification, the soul is deeply convinced that the only reality that counts is supernatural life, and it then asks itself whether it will be able to persevere in this life. At this stage the effects of the purification of hope begin to make themselves felt. This is the third conversion, where we find again, as in the first, the acts of the three theological virtues, but in a far superior manner.²¹⁸¹ The Lord plows the same furrow more deeply that the seed placed in the earth may produce not only ten or thirtyfold, but even sixty and a hundredfold, as we read in the Gospel.²¹⁸²

At this time there begins in the soul a more intimate contemplation of God, which tends to become continuous and like an uninterrupted conversation with Him. Then one grasps increasingly better what is said in the Book of Wisdom about the value of wisdom itself: "I preferred her before kingdoms and thrones, and esteemed riches nothing in comparison of her. Neither did I compare unto her any precious stone: for all gold in comparison of her is as a little sand, and silver in respect to her shall be counted as clay."²¹⁸³ This wisdom is the "pearl of great price" mentioned in the Gospel; a man sells all that he has to buy it.²¹⁸⁴

THE PURIFICATION OF HOPE

After the effects of the purification of faith, the purification of hope begins to make itself felt. The soul, now convinced that the one thing necessary is sanctification and salvation, asks itself at times whether, in the midst of the great difficulties it is in, it will persevere to the end.

Hope is the theological virtue by which we tend toward God, as toward our beatitude, relying, in order to reach Him, on His mercy and His helpful omnipotence. The first object of hope is God to be possessed eternally; the formal motive of this theological virtue is God our Helper, *Deus auxilians*, as the formal motive of faith is God revealing: *Veritas prima revelans*.

Every good Christian has this infused virtue, united to charity; and it is indeed God whom he hopes for when he asks for the grace necessary for salvation. But often our hope lacks elevation, in the sense that we excessively desire certain temporal goods, which may seem useful to us for our salvation and yet are not. We may even too greatly desire certain human goods which would be harmful to us and would impede the higher goods that come from detachment and humility. From this point of view, our hope lacks life; it does not rise directly enough toward God.

Moreover, there is often some alloy in the motive inspiring our hope. Doubtless we count on the help of God, but we also rely, and occasionally too much so, on inferior motives that are much less sure. We may have too much confidence in ourselves, in our tact, energy, virtues, in various human helps within our reach, just as we may pass through moments of discouragement when we do not succeed and human helps fail us.

If God, wishing to purify our hope of all alloy, should suddenly take away from us the temporal goods which we hope for and also the secondary motives which sustain our trust,—the sympathy and help of our friends, the encouragement and esteem of superiors if at the same time He should show us our frailty in a hitherto unsuspected degree, if He were to permit calumnies, tenacious contradictions against us, and, with all of that, illness, would we still hope "against all human hope" for this sole motive, that no matter what happens God remains infinitely helpful?

This is the time to say: "The Lord is compassionate and merciful, long suffering, and plenteous in mercy";²¹⁸⁵ "God never commands the impossible";²¹⁸⁶ He never permits us to be tempted above our strength, aided by grace.²¹⁸⁷ The divine help is always offered to us for salvation; God does not abandon us unless we first abandon Him; He is always willing to raise us up from our sins when we cry to Him.

Speaking through Isaias, the Lord says: "For the mountains shall be moved, and the hills shall tremble; but My mercy shall not depart from thee, and the covenant of My peace shall not be moved: said the Lord that hath mercy on thee."²¹⁸⁸

The Psalmist writes: “For He hath hidden me in His tabernacle; in the day of evils, He hath protected me in the secret place of His tabernacle. He hath exalted me upon a rock.... Thy face, O Lord, will I still seek.... Be Thou my helper, forsake me not; do not Thou despise me, O God my Savior. For my father and my mother have left me; but the Lord hath taken me up.”²¹⁸⁹

The saints hoped thus in the hours of their great trials. In his Lamentations, Jeremias lets the following cry of anguish escape: “My end and my hope is perished from the Lord,” but immediately after he cries out: “Remember my poverty, and transgression, the wormwood and the gall.... The mercies of the Lord that we are not consumed: because His commiserations have not failed... For the Lord will not cast off forever. For if He hath cast off, He will also have mercy, according to the multitude of His mercies. For He hath not willingly afflicted, nor cast off the children of men.”²¹⁹⁰

In his prison St. John the Baptist hoped in this manner when he saw all that was opposed to the kingdom of God, whose coming he had announced. So too the apostles remained firm even to martyrdom. We find another example of heroic hope in St. John of the Cross, who continued to hope in his prison cell when all seemed leagued against the reform of Carmel. In the same way St. Alphonsus Liguori heroically placed his trust in God when the religious family that he had founded seemed on the point of perishing. At times the sacrifice of Isaac is again demanded of the true servants of God, that they may labor at the task entrusted to them, no longer as if it were theirs, but as the work of Almighty God, who can overcome all obstacles and who will infallibly overcome them if He has decreed from all eternity that the work in question should be established.

Then, above every inferior motive of trust, will increasingly appear the formal motive of Christian hope: *Deus auxilians*, God our Helper, His helpful omnipotence, and the infinite merits of Christ; and the soul will be moved to utter the prayer of Esther: “O my Lord, who alone art our King, help me a desolate woman, and who have no other helper but Thee. My danger is in my hands.... Give not, O Lord, Thy scepter to them that are not.... Remember, O Lord, and show Thyself to us in the time of our tribulation, and give me boldness.... O God, who art mighty above, all hear the voice of them that have no other hope, and deliver us from the hand of the wicked, and deliver me from my fear.”²¹⁹¹

Hope is here transformed into perfect abandonment, whether in regard to a divine work to be accomplished on earth or to our eternal salvation. This trusting abandonment rests on the divine will not yet manifested; but that it may rest on it in this way, presupposes constant fidelity to the divine will already signified by the duty of the present moment. The more our will conforms through obedience to the signified divine will, the more it can abandon itself with confidence to the divine will of good pleasure not yet manifested, on which our future and eternity depend. The same holds true for the dying, and should be kept in mind when we are assisting them in their agony. We should beg God to grant them this trust, united to perfect abandonment, that, being conformed to His signified divine will, they may with more perfect trust accept death, that leap into the unknown, which is nothing else than abandonment to the divine good pleasure not yet manifested. In this way the soul rises above the obscurity from beneath, which comes from matter, error, and sin, that it may lose itself in the obscurity from on high, which is that of the intimate life of God and of His love for each of us.²¹⁹²

At the end of this purification of hope, this virtue is freed from self-love which mingled in it, from the more or less inordinate desire of consolation, and it becomes much stronger in its purity. Hope is the desire for God, to possess Him Himself, above His gifts; and yet God does not show Himself, does not make His presence felt. At this time the soul begins to experience the effect of the passive purification of charity.

THE PURIFICATION OF CHARITY

At this stage particularly, the passive purifications of the present life resemble those of purgatory, although they differ greatly from it, since in purgatory there is no longer any merit or increase of charity.

This theological virtue, the highest of the infused virtues, is that which makes us love God for Himself, because He is infinitely lovable in Himself, infinitely better than every creature and than all His gifts. It makes us love Him also because He first loved us, by communicating to us a participation in His intimate life. Charity is thus a holy friendship by which we give back to God the love He has for us, and by which also we love our neighbor inasmuch as he is loved by God, inasmuch as he is a child of God or called to become one.

Every good Christian undoubtedly has this virtue. By it we love God for Himself; but we also love Him for the consolations He gives us, because He makes Himself felt by us, because what we undertake for Him succeeds and gives us contentment. Likewise, we love our neighbor for the love of God, because he is loved by our common Father; but we also love him because he responds to our charity, our courtesies, our devotion, because he gives evidence of gratitude. And at times when, instead of gratitude, we see ingratitude, we do not love the soul of our seemingly ungrateful neighbor as we should, for, as a matter of fact, we should love even our enemies and pray for those who persecute us, that they may return to the road of salvation. Consequently there is some alloy in our charity. This base element is evident occasionally when our charity fails to overcome some bitterness or ill-temper, following on a want of consideration.

Therefore, when the Lord wishes to lead a soul, already possessed of great hope, to a more pure, more disinterested love of

God for Himself, above all His gifts, He deprives it of all spiritual consolation, of His sensible presence, for months and years, though He becomes more intimately present in the soul and acts more profoundly in it. He seems to withdraw from it, as God the Father seemed to withdraw from the soul of Jesus on the cross when in His agony He cried out: “My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?”²¹⁹³ This exclamation, taken from a Messianic psalm,²¹⁹⁴ is immediately followed in the same psalm, as it was in the heart of Christ, by sentiments of perfect trust, abandonment, and love.

When in this spiritual night the soul seems to be abandoned by God, it makes a great act of love for this sole and most pure motive: God is infinitely good in Himself, infinitely better than every created gift, and it is He who first loved us. Following the example of His crucified Son, I must return Him love for love.

St. Teresa of the Child Jesus was well acquainted with these very painful hours, and what we learn about them in her life helps us to a clearer understanding of the doctrine of St. John of the Cross on the purification of love, and of St. Thomas’ teaching on the formal motive of charity. At this stage of the spiritual life, this motive appears in all its elevation, like a star of first magnitude in the night of the spirit, together with the motive of faith and that of hope.

We read, in fact, toward the end of the life of St. Teresa of the Child Jesus:

My soul has known many kinds of trials. I have suffered greatly here on earth. In my childhood, I suffered with sadness; today, in peace and joy I taste all bitter fruits.... During the luminous days of the paschal season last year, Jesus made me understand that there are really impious souls without faith and hope (which I found it hard to believe). He then allowed my soul to be invaded by the thickest darkness, and the thought of heaven, which had been so sweet to me since my early childhood, to become for me a subject for struggle and torment. The duration of this trial was not limited to a few days, a few weeks; I have been suffering for months and I am still waiting for the hour of my deliverance. I wish I could express what I feel, but it is impossible. One must have passed through this dark tunnel to understand its obscurity....

Lord, Thy child has understood Thy divine light which shines in the darkness. She begs Thee to pardon her unbelieving brethren, and is willing to eat the bread of suffering as long as Thou mayest wish. For love of Thee she takes her place at this table filled with bitterness where poor sinners take their food, and she does not wish to rise from it before receiving a sign from Thy hand. But may she not say in her own name and in the name of her guilty brethren: “O God, be merciful to us sinners?”²¹⁹⁵ Send us away justified. May all those who are not enlightened by the torch of faith at last see it shine.... When, weary of the surrounding darkness, I wish to rest my heart by the fortifying memory of a future and eternal life, my torment redoubles. It seems to me that the shadows, borrowing the voice of the impious mockingly say to me: “You dream of light, of a sweet-scented country, you dream of the eternal possession of the Creator of these marvels; you believe that you will one day emerge from the mists in which you languish. Forward! Forward! Rejoice in death, which will give you, not what you hope for, but a still darker night, the night of nothingness....”

Knowing that it is cowardly to fight a duel, I turn my back on my adversary without ever looking him in the face; then I run to Jesus and tell Him that I am ready to shed every drop of my blood to acknowledge that there is a heaven. I tell Him that I am happy not to be able to contemplate here on earth with the eyes of my soul the beautiful heaven which awaits me, in order that He may deign to open it for eternity to poor unbelievers.

Consequently, in spite of this trial which takes from me every feeling of enjoyment, I can still cry out: “Thou hast given me, O Lord, a delight in Thy doings.”²¹⁹⁶ For what joy can be greater than that of suffering for Thy love? The more intense the suffering is and the less it appears to men, the more it causes Thee to smile, O my God.... May I prevent or make reparation for a single sin committed against faith....

When I sing of the happiness of heaven, of the eternal possession of God, I do not experience any joy, for I sing simply what I will to believe. At times, I admit, a very tiny ray of light illumines my dark night, then the trial ceases for a moment; but afterward, the memory of this ray, instead of consoling me, makes my darkness thicker still.

I have never felt so fully that the Lord is sweet and merciful. He did not send me this heavy cross until I was able to bear it; formerly, I believe that it would have cast me into discouragement. Now it produces only one effect: it takes from me every feeling of natural satisfaction in my longing for heaven.²¹⁹⁷

Such is the simultaneous passive purification of faith, hope, and love of God and of souls in God, a purification which, in the case of St. Teresa of the Child Jesus, is united to reparatory suffering for sinners.

Then the most pure motive of this love of charity appears in all its elevation: namely, that God is sovereignly lovable in Himself, infinitely more so than all the gifts which He has given us and which we expect from Him. Here the acts of faith, hope, and charity fuse, so to speak, in an act of perfect abandonment to the divine will, while the soul repeats the words of Christ on the cross: “Father, into Thy hands I commend My spirit.”²¹⁹⁸

Then the soul understands what St. John of the Cross says: “For this is a certain fire of love in the spirit whereby the soul, amidst these dark trials, feels itself wounded to the quick by this strong love divine.... And inasmuch as this love is infused in a special way, the soul corresponds only passively with it, and thus a strong passion of love is begotten within it.... The soul is itself touched, wounded, and set on fire with love.... The soul, however, amidst these gloomy and loving pains, is conscious of a certain companionship and inward strength which attends upon it and invigorates it.”²¹⁹⁹

St. Teresa speaks in like manner of this last purification which precedes the transforming union: “She sees herself still far away from God, yet with her increased knowledge of His attributes, her longing and her love for Him grow ever stronger as she learns more fully how this great God and Sovereign deserves to be loved.... She is like one suspended in mid-air, who can neither touch the earth nor mount to heaven; she is unable to reach the water while parched with thirst, and this is not a thirst that can be borne, but one which nothing will quench.”²²⁰⁰

At the end of this trial, charity toward God and one’s neighbor is purified of all alloy, as gold in the crucible is freed from

its dress. And not only is the love of charity thus purified, but notably increased. The soul now makes intense and heroic acts of charity, which obtain immediately the increase of grace which they merit, and with sanctifying grace increase greatly at the same time all the infused virtues and the seven gifts of the Holy Ghost, which are connected with charity.

The love of God and of souls then becomes increasingly disinterested, ever more ardent and forgetful of self. We admire the purity of the conjugal love of the sailor's wife who does not cease to think of her absent husband, who may be dead, since for several months she has had no word that he is still alive. She loves him as if he were present, and brings up her children in the love of their father who has disappeared. How can we fail to admire the purity of love in these spouses of Jesus Christ who, like St. Teresa of Lisieux, remain for a long time, for months and months, deprived of His presence, in the greatest darkness and aridity, and who do not cease to love Him with a love as strong as it is pure, for the sole motive that He is infinitely good in Himself and incomparably more so than all His gifts! In this state the tenderness of love is transformed into the strength of union, according to the expression of the Canticle of Canticles: "Love is strong as death,"²²⁰¹ and even stronger, for no trial can overthrow love. The soul then remembers that in our Lord, who fashions souls to His image, love on the cross was stronger than spiritual death, that it was the conqueror of sin and the devil, and by the resurrection the victor over death which is the result of sin. In the passive purifications, described by St. John of the Cross, the Christian and Catholic mystic relives these great truths of faith; thereby the soul is configured to Christ in His sorrowful life, before being configured to Him in His glorious life for eternity.

SUFFERINGS THAT SOMETIMES ACCOMPANY THE PASSIVE PURIFICATION OF THE SPIRIT

St. Teresa²²⁰² speaks of this purification, but does not distinguish as clearly as St. John of the Cross does, what essentially constitutes it from the sufferings which quite often accompany it, and which she herself experienced, as we see from her autobiography.²²⁰³

In *The Interior Castle* she writes:

O my God, how many troubles both interior and exterior must one suffer before entering the seventh mansion! Sometimes, while pondering over this I fear that, were they known beforehand, human infirmity could scarcely bear the thought nor resolve to encounter them, however great might appear the gain.... They really seem to have lost everything.

I shall not enumerate these trials in their proper order, but will describe them as they come to my memory, beginning with the least severe. This is an outcry raised against such a person by those amongst whom she lives.... They say she wants to pass for a saint, that she goes to extremes in piety to deceive the world.... Persons she thought were her friends desert her, making the most bitter remarks of all. They take it much to heart that her soul is ruined—she is manifestly deluded—it is all the devil's work—she will share the fate of so-and-so who was lost through him.... They make a thousand scoffing remarks of the same sort.

I know someone who feared she would be unable to find any priest who would hear her confession,²²⁰⁴ to such a pass did things come.... The worst of it is, these troubles do not blow over but last all her life.... How few think well of her in comparison with the many who hate her!... Experience has shown the mind that men are as ready to speak well as ill of others, so it attaches no more importance to the one than to the other.... [Later] the soul is rather strengthened than depressed by its trials, experience having taught it the great advantages derived from them. It does not think men offend God by persecuting it, but that He permits them to do so for its greater gain....

Our Lord now usually sends severe bodily infirmity.... Yet, oh! the rest would seem trifling in comparison could I relate the interior torments met with here, but they are impossible to describe. Let us first speak of the trial of meeting with so timorous and inexperienced a confessor that nothing seems safe to him; he dreads and suspects everything but the commonplace, especially in a soul in which he detects any imperfection, for he thinks people on whom God bestows such favors must be angels, which is impossible while we live in our bodies. He at once ascribes everything to the devil or melancholy....

One of the severe trials of these souls, especially if they have lived wicked lives, is their belief that God permits them to be deceived in punishment for their sins. While actually receiving these graces they feel secure and cannot but suppose that these favors proceed from the Spirit of God; but this state lasts a very short time, while the remembrance of their misdeeds is ever before them, so that when, as is sure to happen, they discover any faults in themselves, these torturing thoughts return. The soul is quieted for a time when the confessor reassures it, although it returns later on to its former apprehensions; but when he augments its fears they become almost unbearable: Especially is this the case when such spiritual dryness ensues that the mind feels as if it never had thought of God nor ever will be able to do so. When men speak of Him, they seem to be talking of some person heard of long ago.

All this is nothing without the further pain of thinking we cannot make our confessors understand the case and are deceiving them... She believes all that the imagination, which now has the upper hand, puts before her mind, besides crediting the falsehoods suggested to her by the devil, whom doubtless our Lord gives leave to tempt her....

In short, there is no other remedy in such a tempest except to wait for the mercy of God who, unexpectedly, by some casual word or unforeseen circumstance, suddenly dispels all these sorrows.... It praises our Lord God like one who has come out victorious from a dangerous battle, for it was He who won the victory. The soul is fully conscious that the conquest was not its own as all weapons of self-defence appeared to be in the enemies' hands. Thus it realizes its weakness and how little man can help himself if God forsake him.²²⁰⁵

Tauler speaks in like strain, as we noted earlier. His teaching on this subject, which should be read, will be found in his sermons for the Monday before Palm Sunday (nos. 7, 8), for Easter Sunday, for the Monday before Ascension Thursday, and in the third sermon for the Ascension.²²⁰⁶

It would be easy to show by quotations from other masters that the teaching of St. John of the Cross is entirely conformable

to the tradition of the great spiritual writers, to what they have said of the royal way of the cross, *ad lucem per crucem*, and of the progressive configuration of the soul to Christ crucified. We read in St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans:^{[2207](#)} "Heirs indeed of God, and joint heirs with Christ: yet so, if we suffer with Him, that we may be also glorified with Him."

The Spiritual Age of the Perfect, Their Union with God

The painful passive purification just described is followed by a resurrection of the soul and a new life. The apostles experienced this change when, after being deprived of the presence of Christ's humanity on Ascension Day, they were on Pentecost transformed, enlightened, strengthened, and confirmed in grace by the Holy Ghost that they might preach the Gospel to the ends of the known world and seal their preaching with their blood.

We shall point out here the principal signs of the age of the perfect so far as it is distinguished from the age of beginners and that of proficient. We shall indicate particularly what characterizes the knowledge of God and of self in the perfect and also their love of charity.

QUASI-EXPERIMENTAL AND ALMOST CONTINUAL KNOWLEDGE OF GOD

After the passive purification of the spirit, which is like a third conversion and transformation, the perfect know God in a quasiexperimental manner that is not transitory, but almost continual. Not only during Mass, the Divine Office, or prayer, but in the midst of external occupations, they remain in the presence of God and preserve actual union with Him.

The matter will be easily understood by our considering the egoist's contrary state of soul. The egoist thinks always of himself and, without realizing it, refers everything to himself. He talks continually with himself about his inordinate desires, sorrows, or superficial joys; his intimate conversation with himself is endless, but it is vain, sterile, and unproductive for all. The perfect man, on the contrary, instead of thinking always of himself, thinks continually of God, His glory, and the salvation of souls; he instinctively makes everything converge toward the object of his thoughts. His intimate conversation is no longer with himself, but with God, and the words of the Gospel frequently recur to his mind to enlighten from on high the smallest pleasurable or painful facts of daily life. His soul sings the glory of God, and from it radiate spiritual light and fervor, which are perpetually bestowed on him from above.

The reason for this state is that the perfect man, unlike the beginner, no longer contemplates God only in the mirror of sensible things or of the Gospel parables, about which it is impossible to think continually. Neither does he, like the proficient, contemplate God only in the mirror of the mysteries of the life of Christ, a prayer that cannot last all day long; but, in the penumbra of faith, he contemplates the divine goodness itself, a little as we see the diffused light that always surrounds us and illumines everything from above.

According to the terms used by Dionysius the Mystic and preserved by St. Thomas,²²⁰⁸ this is the movement of circular contemplation, superior to the straight and the oblique movements. The straight movement, like the flight of the lark, rises from a sensible fact recalled in a parable to a divine perfection, from the sight of the prodigal son to infinite mercy. The oblique movement rises, for example, from the mysteries of the childhood of Christ to those of His passion, of His glory, and finally to the infinite love of God for us. The circular movement is similar to the flight of the eagle, which, after soaring aloft, delights in describing the same circle several times, then hovers seemingly motionless in the light of the sun, scrutinizing the depths of the horizon.

Here it is a question of a knowledge of the radiating goodness of God. The soul sees now in a quasi-experimental manner that everything God has done in the order of nature and that of grace is intended to manifest His goodness, and that if He permits evil, like a dissonance, it is for a higher good, which is glimpsed at times and which will appear on the last day.

This contemplation, by reason of its superior simplicity, may be continual and, far from hindering us from beholding the sequence of events, lets us see them from above, somewhat as God sees them as a man on a mountain sees what is happening on the plain below. It is like the prelude or the aurora of the vision of the fatherland, although the soul is still in the obscurity of faith.

This very simple supernatural view even on earth was continual in Mary, to a lesser degree in St. Joseph. It also enabled the apostles after Pentecost, to see in the divine light what they were to do for the preaching of the Gospel and the constitution of the first churches.

This all-embracing spiritual gaze is to be found in all the saints; it does not exclude significant details, but admirably perceives their profound meaning. At the same time it removes the imperfections springing from natural haste, unconscious self-seeking, and the lack of habitual recollection.

As a consequence the perfect know themselves, no longer only in themselves but in God, their beginning and end. In Him they see their indigence, the infinite distance separating them from the Creator; they feel themselves preserved in being by His

sovereignly free love. They ceaselessly experience to what a degree they need His grace for the least salutary act; they do not become discouraged over their sins, but draw a truer humility from them. They make their examination of conscience by considering what is written of their existence in the book of life. They sincerely consider themselves useless servants, who of themselves can do nothing, but whom the Lord deigns to use for the accomplishment of great things, those that prepare the life of eternity. If they see their neighbor's sins, they think there is no sin committed by another which they themselves would not be capable of committing had they the same heredity and were they placed in the same circumstances, faced with the same temptations. If they see the great virtues of other souls, they rejoice in them for the sake of the Lord and of souls, remembering that in the mystical body of Christ the growth of one member redounds to the profit of all the others.

This infused contemplation proceeds from a living faith illumined by the gift of wisdom, which, under the special inspiration of the Holy Ghost, shows that nothing good happens unless God wills it, nothing evil unless God permits it for a higher good. This eminent view may be almost continual by reason of its simplicity and universality, because the events of daily life fall under its scope, like lessons about the things of God and like the application of the Gospel to each one's life. It is the continuation of the Gospel which is being written in souls until the end of time.

Then the Christian who has attained to this state has such knowledge of the divine perfections and of the virtues demanded of the soul, that he has passed beyond not only the confused concept but also the distinct concept of the theologian, to the experimental concept, rich in all the experience of life, which becomes concrete, enlightening him from above for the good of souls. Thus he attains to the experiential concept of infinite goodness, as well as to that of perfect simplicity and true humility, which inclines him to love to be nothing in order that God may be all.

LOVING GOD WITH ONE'S WHOLE MIND

The perfect man attains in consequence to that profound intimacy with the Lord toward which charity or the divine friendship tends. Such intimacy is truly reciprocal benevolence together with this convivere, this life shared with another, which is a prolonged spiritual communion.

As the egoist, who is always thinking of himself, loves himself badly in every respect, the perfect man, who is almost always thinking of God, loves Him continually, no longer only by fleeing from sin, or by imitating the virtues of our Lord, but "by adhering to Him, by enjoying Him; and, as St. Paul says, he 'desires to be dissolved and to be with Christ.'"²²⁰⁹ This adherence to God is a simple, direct act, which transforms a man's fundamental will and is at the basis of discursive and reflective acts. This adherence to God loved above all, not only as another self but more than self, contains the solution of the problem of the pure love of God harmonized with a legitimate love of self, for indeed the perfect man loves himself in God while loving God more than himself, and he desires heaven less for his personal happiness than that he may eternally glorify the divine goodness, the source of every created good. He tends more toward God Himself than toward the joy that will come to him from God.²²¹⁰ This is pure love of God and of souls in God; it is apostolic zeal more ardent than ever, but humble, patient, and meek.

Here the soul grasps the profound meaning of the gradation contained in the statement of the precept of love according to Deuteronomy (6: 5) and St. Luke (10: 1. 7): "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart and with thy whole soul and with all thy strength and with all thy mind." The beginner already loves God with his whole heart, occasionally receiving sensible consolations in prayer; next he loves God with his whole soul without consolation, placing all his activities at His service; later the advanced Christian loves God with all his strength, particularly in the trials of the night of the spirit; finally, on emerging from these trials, he loves the Lord with all his mind. The perfect man no longer rises only at rare intervals to this higher region of the soul; he is established there; he is spiritualized and supernaturalized; he has become "an adorer in spirit and in truth."

Consequently such souls almost always keep their peace even in the midst of the most painful and unforeseen circumstances, and they communicate it frequently to the most troubled. This is what causes St. Augustine to say that the beatitude of the peacemakers corresponds to the gift of wisdom, which, with charity, definitively predominates in the perfect. Their eminent model, after the holy soul of Christ, is the Blessed Virgin Mary.

Therefore it is evident that the spiritual age of the perfect is characterized by almost uninterrupted intimate conversation with God, loved purely above all, together with the ardent desire of making Him known and loved.

THE INDWELLING OF THE BLESSED TRINITY IN THE PURIFIED SOUL

Consideration of what characterizes the purified soul throws light on the nature of the indwelling of the Blessed Trinity in the perfect soul. In heaven the three divine Persons dwell in the beatified soul as in a temple where they are clearly known and loved. The Blessed Trinity is seen openly in the innermost depths of the beatified soul, which It preserves in existence and in consummated and inamissible grace. Each of the blessed is thus like a living tabernacle, like a consecrated host, endowed with

supernatural knowledge and love.

The normal prelude to this life of heaven is realized on earth in the perfect soul that has reached the transforming union, which we shall describe farther on, following St. John of the Cross. Here we wish merely to point out that this close union is not essentially extraordinary, although very rare; but that it is the result of the mystery of the indwelling of the Blessed Trinity in every just soul²²¹¹

The life of grace, which is the seed of glory, is essentially the same as the life of heaven. And since in heaven the Blessed Trinity is present in the souls of the blessed, where It is seen without any veil, It must already dwell in the just soul here on earth in the obscurity of faith, and according as the soul is more purified, it has a proportionately better experimental knowledge of this divine presence. As the soul is present to itself and knows itself experimentally as the principle of its acts, so it is given to it to know God as the principle of supernatural acts which it could not produce without His special inspiration.

And the purer the soul is, the more it distinguishes in itself what comes from itself with the general help of God and what can come only from the inspiration of the Holy Ghost. Christ declares: "If anyone love Me, he will keep My word. And My Father will love him, and We will come to him and will make Our abode with him."²²¹² "But the Paraclete, the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring all things to your mind, whatsoever I shall have said to you."²²¹³ St. John also says to his disciples: "His unction teacheth you of all things."²²¹⁴ And St. Paul writes to the Romans: "For whosoever are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God. For you have not received the spirit of bondage again in fear; but you have received the spirit of adoption of sons, whereby we cry: Abba (Father). For the Spirit Himself giveth testimony to our spirit that we are the sons of God."²²¹⁵ Commenting on these words, St. Thomas says that the Holy Ghost gives us this testimony by the filial affection He inspires in us for Him. He thus makes Himself felt at times as the soul of our soul and the life of our life.

It is especially through the gift of wisdom that we have the quasiexperimental knowledge of this divine presence. As St. Thomas explains,²²¹⁶ this gift makes us, in fact, judge of divine things by a certain connaturalness with these things, by a sort of supernatural sympathy based on charity, and by the inspiration of the Holy Ghost who makes use of this sympathy, which He Himself has aroused to make Himself felt by us. We thus taste the mysteries of salvation and the presence of God in us a little as the disciples of Emmaus did when they said: "Was not our heart burning within us, whilst He spoke in the way?"²²¹⁷ What the disciples experienced was a quasi-experimental knowledge, superior to reasoning, analogous to that which the soul has of itself as the principle of its acts. God, the Author of grace and salvation, is closer to us than we are to ourselves, and He inspires in us the most profound acts to which we could not of ourselves move ourselves. In this way He makes Himself felt by us as the principle of our interior life.²²¹⁸

The term "quasi-experimental" is applied to this knowledge for two reasons: (1) because it does not attain God in an absolutely immediate manner, as happens in the beatific vision, but in the act of filial love which He produces in us; (2) because we cannot discern with absolute certitude these supernatural acts of love from the natural impulses of the heart that resemble them. Hence without a special revelation or an equivalent favor we cannot have absolute certainty of being in the state of grace.

The indwelling of the Blessed Trinity is permanent as long as habitual union with God lasts, from the fact of the state of grace; it is thus that it lasts even during sleep. But this habitual union is manifestly ordered to the actual union we have just spoken of, and even to the closest, to the transforming union, the prelude of that of heaven.

Consequently it is evident that in the purified soul the supernatural image of God appears more and more.²²¹⁹ By its nature the soul is already the image of God, since it is a spiritual substance, capable of intellectual knowledge and love. By habitual grace, the principle of the theological virtues, the soul is capable of supernatural knowledge and love of God. The more habitual grace and charity grow, the more they separate us from what is inferior and unite us to God. Finally, in heaven, consummated grace will enable us to see God immediately as He sees Himself and to love Him as He loves Himself. Then the supernatural image of God in us will be completed; inamissible charity will render us like the Holy Ghost, personal Love; the beatific vision will liken us to the Word, who, being the splendor of the Father, will make us like to Him. We can thus judge what should be even here on earth that perfect union, which is the proximate disposition to receive the beatific vision immediately after death without having to pass through purgatory. It is the secret of the lives of the saints.²²²⁰

THE SIGNS OF THE INDWELLING OF THE BLESSED TRINITY IN THE PURIFIED SOUL

The signs of this indwelling are set forth at length by St. Thomas in the *Contra Gentes*,²²²¹ and more briefly in the *Summa theologiae*²²²² where he asks whether a man can know if he is in the state of grace. Without having absolute certitude that he has grace, he has signs which enable him, for example, to approach the Holy Table without fear of making a sacrilegious Communion.

The principal signs of the state of grace, in ascending gradation, are the following.

The first sign is the testimony of a good conscience, in the sense that he is not conscious of any mortal sin. This is the fundamental sign, presupposed by the following signs which confirm it.

A second sign is joy in hearing the word of God preached, not only for the sake of hearing it, but to put it into practice. This may be observed in several countries where there is preserved, together with a simple life, a great Christian faith which leads the faithful to listen willingly to their pastor when he explains the great truths of the Gospel.

A third sign, confirming the preceding ones, is the relish of divine wisdom, which leads a man to read the Gospel privately, to seek in it the spirit under the letter, to nourish his soul with it, even when it deals with the mystery of the cross and with the cross he must bear every day.

A fourth sign is the inclination leading the soul to converse intimately with God, and faithfully to resume this conversation when it has been interrupted. We cannot repeat too often that every man carries on an intimate conversation with himself, which, at times, is not good. True interior life begins, as we have often pointed out, when this intimate conversation is no longer only with self, but with God. St. Thomas says: "Friendship inclines a man to wish to converse with his friend. The conversation of man with God is made through the contemplation of God, according to these words of St. Paul: 'Our conversation is in heaven' (Phil. 3: 20). And as the Holy Ghost gives us the love of God, He also inclines us to contemplate Him. That is why the Apostle also says: 'But we all beholding the glory of the Lord with open face, are transformed into the same image from glory to glory, as by the Spirit of the Lord'" (II Cor. 3: 18).²²²³

This is one of St. Thomas' texts which most clearly shows that in his opinion the infused contemplation of the mysteries of faith is not something extraordinary, but something eminent in the normal way of sanctity.

The holy doctor says in the preceding chapter²²²⁴ that this intimate conversation with God is like the revelation of the most secret thoughts, in the sense that nothing in us is hidden from the Lord and that He Himself recalls to us the portion of the Gospel that should illumine the duty of every moment. There, says St. Thomas, we have an effect of friendship, "for it in a way unites two hearts in one, and what we reveal to a true friend seems not to have been said outside of ourselves."²²²⁵

A fifth sign is to rejoice in God, fully consenting to His will even in adversity. Sometimes in the midst of dejection there is given us a pure and lofty joy which dissipates all sadness. This is a great sign of the Lord's visit. Moreover, Jesus, in promising the Holy Ghost, called Him the Paraclete, or Comforter. And normally we rejoice so much the more in the Lord as we more perfectly fulfill His precepts, for by so doing we form increasingly one sole heart with Him.

A sixth sign is found in the liberty of the children of God. On this subject, St. Thomas writes: "The children of God are led by the Holy Ghost, not like slaves, but like free creatures.... The Holy Ghost, in fact, makes us act by inclining our free will to will, for He gives us to love God and inclines us to act for love of Him and not through fear in a servile manner. That is why St. Paul tells us: 'You have not received the spirit of bondage again in fear; but you have received the spirit of adoption of sons, whereby we cry: Abba (Father). For the Spirit Himself giveth testimony to our spirit, that we are the sons of God.'²²²⁶ The Apostle also says: 'Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty' (II Cor. 3: 17, deliverance from the slavery of sin, and 'If by the Spirit you mortify the deeds [and affections] of the flesh, you shall live' (Rom. 8: 13)'"²²²⁷ This is truly the deliverance or the holy liberty of the children of God, who reign with Him over inordinate desires, the spirit of the world, and the spirit of evil.

Lastly, a seventh sign of the indwelling of the Blessed Trinity in the soul, according to St. Thomas,²²²⁸ is that the person speaks of God out of the abundance of his heart. In this sense is realized what the holy doctor says elsewhere: "Preaching should spring from the plenitude of the contemplation of the mysteries of faith."²²²⁹ Thus, from Pentecost on, St. Peter and the apostles preached the mystery of the redemption; so too, St. Stephen, the first martyr, preached before being stoned; and likewise St. Dominic, who knew how to speak only with God or of God. Thus the Holy Ghost appears increasingly as a source of ever new graces, an unexhausted and inexhaustible source, "the source of living water springing up into life eternal," the source of light and love.

He is, as the saints say, our consolation in the sorrows of exile. A great hope is left to us in the present world crisis, for the hand of the Lord is not shortened. The numerous saints recently canonized evidence the fact that God is always rich in mercy. These saints who are His great servants, furnish us with magnificent, and often imitable, examples of faith, hope, and love. Proof of this statement is found in the lives of St. Teresa of the Child Jesus, St. Gemma Galgani, St. John Bosco, St. Joseph Cottolengo, Blessed Anthony Mary Claret, St. Catherine Laboure, St. Louise de Marillac, St. Conrad of Parzham, the humble Capuchin lay brother in whom are so admirably fulfilled our Savior's words: "I confess to Thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because Thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them to little ones" (Matt. 11:25).

In this spirit interior souls should consecrate themselves to the Holy Ghost in order to place themselves more profoundly under His direction and impulsion, and not allow so many of His inspirations to pass unperceived.

Good Christians consecrate themselves to the Blessed Virgin that she may lead them to our Lord, and to the Sacred Heart that Jesus may lead them to His Father. Particularly during the Pentecostal season, they should consecrate themselves to the Holy Ghost in order better to discern and follow His inspirations. With this intention they should repeat the beautiful prayer:

O Lux beatissima,
Reple cordis intima
Tuorum fidelium.

Sine tuo numine,
Nihil est in homine,
Nihil est innoxium.

Da virtutis meritum,
Da salutis exitum,
Da perenne gaudium.
Amen.

Chapter 41

A Form of Perfect Life

the Way of Spiritual Childhood

The way of spiritual childhood taught by St. Teresa of Lisieux was highly praised on several occasions by Pope Benedict XV, and by Pope Pius XI who often expressed his confidence in the providential mission of the saint for the spiritual formation of souls in our day. The way of childhood which she recommends to us is explained by the innate qualities of the child, which should be found in an eminent degree in the child of God. There is in this idea a deep intuition in perfect harmony with what theology teaches on sanctifying grace, the infused virtues, and the gifts of the Holy Ghost. By recalling the innate qualities of the child, the principal virtues of the child of God, and what distinguishes spiritual childhood from natural childhood, we shall find great light on the doctrine of grace.

THE INNATE QUALITIES OF THE CHILD

What are ordinarily the innate qualities of a child? In spite of his little defects, we find in a child, as a rule, simplicity and consciousness of his weakness, especially if he has been baptized and is being raised in a Christian manner.

The simplicity, or the absence of duplicity, of a child is wholly spontaneous; in him there is no labored refinement, no affectation. He generally says what he thinks and expresses what he desires without subterfuge, without fear of what people will say. As a rule he does not pose; he shows himself as he is. Conscious of his weakness, for he can do nothing of himself, he depends in everything on his father and mother, from whom he should receive everything. This awareness of his weakness is the seed of humility, which leads him to practice the three theological virtues, often in a profoundly simple manner.

At first the child spontaneously believes what his parents tell him; often they speak to him of God and teach him to pray. Innately the child has confidence in his parents, who teach him to hope in God even before he knows the formula of the act of hope, which he will soon read in his catechism and recite morning and evening. Finally with all his heart the child loves his parents, to whom he owe everything; and if his father and mother are truly Christian, they lift the lively affection of this young heart toward God, our Lord, and His holy Mother. In this simplicity, this consciousness of his weakness, and this simple practice of the three theological virtues, there is the seed of the loftiest spiritual life. For this reason, when Jesus wished to teach His apostles the importance of humility, setting a little child in the midst of them He said: "Amen I say to you, unless you be converted, and become as little children, you shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven."²²³⁰ In recent years we have seen realized the prediction of Pope Pius X: "There will be saints among the children," called at an early age to frequent Communion.

Later on, during the awkward age, the child often loses his simplicity, the consciousness of his weakness, and wishes to act prematurely like a man; he gives evidence of pride and duplicity. And if he delights in speaking of certain virtues, it is less of the theological virtues than of human virtues, like fortitude and courage, which lend importance to his budding personality, and a certain prudence which he does not know how to distinguish from false prudence, and which, in his attempt to hide disorders in his life, may turn into deceit.

The harsh experience of life then reminds him of his weakness; at times he meets with injustice, which shows him the value of a higher justice. He suffers from lies that are believed, thus discovering the value of uprightness. Finally, if he reflects, if he has not ceased to pray a little every day, he understands Christ's words: "Without Me you can do nothing," and the profound meaning of the Our Father again becomes apparent to him. He repeats this prayer of his childhood, sometimes spending ten minutes saying the Our Father once from the depths of his heart. He has again found the road of salvation.

THE PRINCIPAL VIRTUES OF THE CHILD OF GOD

St. Teresa of the Child Jesus reminds us that the principal virtues of the child of God are those in which are reproduced in an eminent degree the innate qualities of the child, minus his defects. Consequently the way of spiritual childhood will teach us to be supernaturally ourselves minus our defects.

The child of God should, first of all, be simple and upright, without duplicity; he should exclude hypocrisy and falsehood from his life, and not seek to pass for what he is not, as our Lord declares in the Sermon on the Mount: "If thy eye be single, thy

whole body shall be lightsome”:²²³¹ that is, if the gaze of your spirit is honest, if your intention is upright, your whole life will be illumined.

The child of God should preserve the consciousness of his weakness and indigence; he should constantly recall that God our Father freely created him from nothing, and that without God’s grace he can do absolutely nothing in the order of sanctification and salvation. If the child of God grows in this humility, he will have an ever deeper faith in the divine word, greater even than little children have in the words of their parents. He will have a faith devoid of human respect, he will be proud of his faith; and from time to time it will become in him penetrating and sweet, above all reasoning. He will truly live by the mysteries of salvation and will taste them; he will contemplate them with admiration, as a little child looks into the eyes of his beloved father.

If the child of God does not go astray, he will see his hope grow stronger from day to day and become transformed into trusting abandonment to Providence. In proportion to his fidelity to the duty of the moment, to the signified divine will, will be his abandonment to the divine good pleasure as yet unknown. The arms of the Lord are, says St. Teresa Of the Child Jesus, like a divine elevator that lifts man up to God.

Finally, the child of God grows steadily in the love of his Father. He loves Him for Himself and not simply for His benefits, as a little child loves his mother more than the caresses he receives from her. The child of God loves his Father in trial as in joy; when life is difficult, he remembers that he should love the Lord with all his strength and even with all his mind, and be always united to Him in the higher part of his soul as an adorer “in spirit and in truth.”

This last characteristic shows that the way of spiritual childhood often demands courage in trial, the virtue of Christian fortitude united to the gift of fortitude. This is especially evident toward the end of the life of St. Teresa of the Child Jesus²²³² when she had to pass through the tunnel, which St. John of the Cross calls the night of the spirit. She passed through this profound darkness with admirable faith, praying for unbelievers, with perfect abandonment and most pure and ardent charity, which led her to the transforming union, the immediate prelude of eternal life.

The way of childhood thus understood wonderfully harmonizes several seemingly contradictory virtues: meekness and fortitude, and also simplicity and prudence, to which Jesus referred when He said to His apostles: “Behold I send you as sheep in the midst of wolves. Be ye therefore wise as serpents and simple as doves.”

We must be prudent with the world, which is often perverse; we must also be strong, at times even to martyrdom, as in Spain and Mexico in recent years. But to have this superior prudence and fortitude, we need the gifts of counsel and fortitude, and to have them we must be increasingly simple and childlike toward God, our Lord, and the Blessed Virgin. The less we should be children in our dealings with men, the more we should become children of God. From Him alone can come the fortitude and prudence we need in the struggles of today: we must hope in God and divine grace more than in the strength of popular movements; and should this force stray farther and farther into the way of atheistic communism, we should continue to resist even to martyrdom, placing our trust in God like a little child in the goodness of his father. Father H. Petitot, O.P., in his book, *St. Teresa of Lisieux: a Spiritual Renaissance*, emphasizes this intimate union of virtues so contrary in appearance in St. Teresa of Lisieux.

Another point of capital importance is that when well understood the way of spiritual childhood wonderfully harmonizes also true humility with the desire for the loving contemplation of the mysteries of salvation. Thereby we see that this contemplation, which proceeds from living faith illumined by the gifts of understanding and wisdom, is in the normal way of sanctity. This penetrating and at times sweet contemplation of the mysteries of faith is not something extraordinary like visions, revelations, and the stigmata, extrinsic favors, so to speak, which we do not find in the life of St. Teresa of Lisieux; it is, on the contrary, the normal fruit of sanctifying grace, called the grace of the virtues and the gifts and the seed of glory. It is the normal prelude of eternal life. This point of doctrine stands out clearly in the writings of St. Teresa of the Child Jesus. She makes us desire and ask the Lord for this loving contemplation of the mysteries of the Incarnation, the redemption, the Eucharist, the Mass, and the indwelling of the Blessed Trinity in our souls.

WHAT DISTINGUISHES SPIRITUAL CHILDHOOD FROM NATURAL CHILDHOOD

Lastly, in her teaching on the way of spiritual childhood, St. Teresa sets forth clearly what constitutes the distinction between spiritual and natural childhood. Differentiating between them, St. Paul tells us: “Do not become children in sense. But in malice be children; and in sense be perfect.”²²³³ Consequently maturity of judgment first of all distinguishes spiritual from natural childhood. But there is also a character to which St. Francis de Sales²²³⁴ draws attention. In the natural order, in proportion as the child grows, the more self-sufficient he should become, for some day he will no longer have his parents. In the order of grace, on the contrary, the more the child of God grows, the more he understands that he will never be self-sufficient and that he depends intimately on God. As he matures, he should live more by the special inspiration of the Holy Ghost, who, by His seven gifts, supplies for the imperfections of his virtues to such an extent that he is finally more passive

under the divine action than given up to his personal activity. In the end he will enter into the bosom of the Father where he will find his beatitude.

A young person, on reaching maturity, leaves his parents to begin life for himself. The middle-aged man occasionally pays a visit to his mother, but he no longer depends on her as he formerly did; instead, it is he who supports her. On the contrary, as the child of God grows up, he becomes so increasingly dependent on his Father that he no longer desires to do anything without Him, without His inspirations or His counsels. Then his whole life is bathed in prayer; he has obtained the best part, which will not be taken away from him. He understands that he must pray always.

This doctrine, at once so simple and so lofty, is set forth in detail in the following page from St. Teresa of Lisieux:

To remain little is to recognize one's nothingness, to expect everything from God, as a little child expects everything from his father; it is to be disturbed about nothing, not to earn a fortune.

Even among poor people, as long as the child is quite small, they give him what he needs; but as soon as he has grown up, his father no longer wishes to feed him and says to him: "Work now, you can be self-supporting." Well, so as never to hear that, I have not wished to grow up. since I feel myself incapable of earning my living, the eternal life of heaven. I have, therefore, always remained little, having no other occupation than to gather the flowers of love and sacrifice and to offer them to God for His pleasure.

To be little also means not to attribute to oneself the virtues that one practices, believing oneself capable of something; but it means recognizing that God places this treasure of virtue in the hand of His little child that he may make use of it when necessity arises; and it is always God's treasure.^{[2235](#)}

This is likewise the teaching of St. Augustine, when he affirms that, in crowning our merits, God crowns His own gifts. This is also what the Council of Trent says: "So great is God's goodness toward us that He wills that His gifts should become merits in us."^{[2236](#)} We can offer Him only what we receive from Him; but what we receive under the form of grace, we offer to Him under the form of merit, adoration, prayer, reparation, and thanksgiving.

St. Teresa adds: "Finally, to be little is not to become discouraged by one's sins, for children often fall, but they are too little to do themselves much harm."

In all this spiritual teaching appears the great doctrine of grace: "Without Me you can do nothing"; "What hast thou that thou hast not received?" St. Teresa lived this lofty doctrine, on which the fathers of the Church and theologians have written so much. She lived it in a very simple and profound manner, allowing the Holy Ghost to lead her, above human reasoning, toward the harbor of salvation, to which she, in her turn, leads many sinners. Happy indeed the theologian who shall have converted as many souls as our saint! The Anglican preacher, Vernon Johnson, was not converted by theologians or by exegetes, but by St. Teresa of the Child Jesus.

St. Gregory the Great expressed his admiration for this way of childhood when he wrote in a homily, which the breviary recalls in the common for virgin martyrs: "When we see young maidens gain the kingdom of heaven by the sword, what do we say, we who are bearded and weak, we who allow ourselves to be dominated by wrath, inflated by pride, disturbed by ambition?"

Truly St. Teresa of Lisieux traced for us the simple road which leads to great heights. In her teaching, as it pleased Pope Pius XI to point out, the gift of wisdom appears in a lofty degree for the direction of souls thirsting for the truth and wishing, above all human conceptions, to live by the word of God.^{[2237](#)}

Section II

The Heroic Degree of the Virtues

To apprehend clearly what the unitive way should be in the full and strong sense of the term, we must treat of the heroic degree of the virtues in general, and more particularly of each of the theological virtues that chiefly constitute our life of union with God. With this intention, we shall also consider devotion to Jesus crucified and to Mary in the unitive way.

The Heroic Degree of the Virtues in General

More perfectly to characterize the spiritual age of the perfect, we shall discuss at this point the heroic degree of the virtues which the Church requires for the beatification of the servants of God.²²³⁸

Heroic virtue commences even in the illuminative way, which begins by the passive purification of the senses, in which there are heroic acts of chastity and patience. With still greater reason it exists in the passive purification of the spirit, which introduces the soul into the unitive way. As we have seen, during this trial the soul must make heroic acts of the theological virtues in order to resist temptations against faith and hope. But this heroic degree manifests itself still more when the soul emerges from this trial into the unitive way of the perfect. We even pointed out earlier in this work that these two nights of the senses and the spirit are like two tunnels whose darkness is quite disconcerting. When we see a soul emerge from the first tunnel and with greater cause from the second with manifestly heroic virtues, it is a sign that the soul has successfully traversed these dark passages, that it did not go astray, or that, if in them it committed some sins, like the Apostle Peter during our Savior's passion, divine grace raised it up again and led it to still greater humility, a greater mistrust of self, and a firmer hope in God.

We shall discuss first the distinctive marks of heroic virtue, then the connection of the virtues in relation to their heroic degree. In the following chapters we shall treat of the heroic degree of the theological and moral virtues in the perfect.

THE DISTINCTIVE MARKS OF HEROIC VIRTUE

On this subject St. Thomas says in his Commentary on St Matthew, apropos of the evangelical beatitudes, which are the most perfect acts of the infused virtues and of the gifts: "Common virtue perfects man in a human manner, heroic virtue gives him a superhuman perfection. When a courageous man fears where he should fear, it is a virtue; if he did not fear in such circumstances, it would be temerity. But if he no longer fears anything, because he relies on the help of God, then it is a superhuman or divine virtue."²²³⁹

It is these heroic virtues that are spoken of in the evangelical beatitudes: blessed are the poor in spirit, the meek, those who weep over their sins, those who hunger and thirst after justice, the merciful, the clean of heart, the peacemakers, those who suffer persecution for justice' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. "Blessed are ye when they shall revile you, and persecute you, and speak all that is evil against you untruly, for My sake."

The true Christian notion of heroic virtue is expressed in these words of our Savior and in the commentary on them given us by the fathers of the Church, in particular by St. Augustine.²²⁴⁰ St. Thomas explains this traditional idea in the Summa,²²⁴¹ where he distinguishes between the social virtues, the perfecting virtues, and those of the purified soul; and also where he treats of the beatitudes. After treating of the acquired virtues of the good citizen (social virtues), St. Thomas describes the infused perfecting virtues as follows: "These virtues... are virtues of men who are on their way and tending toward the divine similitude; and these are called perfecting virtues. Thus prudence by contemplating the things of God, counts as nothing all things of the world, and directs all the thoughts of the soul to God alone; temperance, so far as nature allows, neglects the needs of the body; fortitude prevents the soul from being afraid of neglecting the body and rising to heavenly things; and justice consists in the soul giving a whole-hearted consent to follow the way thus proposed."

In a higher degree, these same infused virtues are called virtues of the fully purified soul; they are those of great saints on earth and of the blessed in heaven. "Thus prudence sees naught else but the things of God (the rules of our conduct); temperance knows no earthly desires (after having often overcome them); fortitude has no knowledge of passion (as in the martyrs); and justice, by imitating the divine Mind, is united thereto by an everlasting covenant."²²⁴²

Treating of the beatitudes, St. Thomas²²⁴³ tells us that, as meritorious acts, they are the highest acts of the infused virtues and of the gifts, and that their reward is here on earth the prelude of eternal life (*aliqua inchoatio beatitudinis*). He distinguishes those of the flight from sin, which is attached to wealth, pleasure, earthly power; those of the active life (the thirst after justice and mercy), and those of the contemplative life (purity of heart, radiating peace); the highest contains all the preceding in the midst even of persecution.

This traditional teaching on the distinctive marks of heroic virtue is summed up by Benedict XIV when he says: "Four things are required for proven or manifest heroic virtue: (1) the matter or object should be difficult, above the common strength of man; (2) the acts should be accomplished promptly, easily; (3) they should be performed with holy joy; (4) they should be

accomplished quite frequently, when the occasion to do so presents itself.”²²⁴⁴

The heroic degree of virtue is therefore superior to the common way of acting of even virtuous souls. Heroic virtue is present when one practices all one’s duties with ease and spontaneity, even in particularly difficult circumstances.

The different signs pointed out by Benedict XIV should be clearly understood in relation to the subject who practices heroic virtue. Thus, what is difficult for a ten-year-old child is what is above the ordinary strength of children of his age; likewise, what is difficult for an old man differs in a measure from what is hard for a man in his prime.

The second distinctive mark, promptness and facility, is understood especially in regard to the higher part of the soul; it does not exclude difficulty in the less elevated part, as the mystery of Gethsemane shows. That the holocaust may be perfect, there must be suffering involved and great difficulty to be overcome; but heroic charity promptly surmounts them.

Likewise holy joy, the third sign, is that of the sacrifice to be accomplished, and does not exclude sorrow and sadness; it is even at times accompanied by extreme dejection, which is religiously offered to God. The joy of suffering for our Lord even increases with suffering, and for that reason it is the sign of a very great grace.

The fourth mark, frequency in the accomplishment of such acts when the occasion demands it, greatly confirms the preceding ones and shows tested heroic virtue.

The heroic degree of virtue is especially evident in martyrdom undergone with faith for love of God; but outside of martyrdom, this heroic degree is often manifest, and at times in a striking manner. This was the case especially in the life of Jesus before His passion, as shown by His humility, meekness, abnegation, magnanimity, and even more so by His immense charity toward all, the charity of the supreme Shepherd of souls who is preparing to give His life for them.

An example of heroic virtue outside of martyrdom is frequently found in the saints, in their pardon of injuries, in their admirable charity toward those who persecute them. For example, one day a spiteful man seeing St. Benedict Joseph Labre passing by, hurled a sharp stone at him; the stone struck the servant of God on the ankle, and the blood gushed forth. The saint immediately bent down, picked up the stone, kissed it, doubtless praying for the man who had thrown it, and then placed the stone at the edge of the road so that it would injure no one else. Still another example is Henry Mary Boudon, archdeacon of Evreux, counselor of his bishop and of many other bishops of France, and the author of excellent spiritual books. As the result of a calumnious letter to the bishop of his diocese, he was forbidden to celebrate Mass and to hear confessions. On receipt of this prohibition, he immediately threw himself at the feet of his crucifix and thanked God for this grace, of which he judged himself unworthy. His action is an example of perfect promptness in the acceptance of the cross.

Such examples could be endlessly multiplied. St. Louis Bertrand remained calm in the midst of great dangers. On one occasion when he perceived that he had drunk a poisoned beverage offered to him, he remained in peace and trusted to God. In the midst of sharp pain, he did not lament, but said to God: “Lord, now burn and cut that Thou mayest spare me in eternity.”

We should note that in heroic virtue the happy mean is far higher than in ordinary virtue. In proportion as the acquired virtue of fortitude grows, without deviating to the right or the left toward contrary vices, its happy mean rises. Higher up still is found the happy mean of the infused virtue of fortitude, which itself rises progressively. Finally, still more elevated is the superior measure of the gift of fortitude, dictated by the Holy Ghost. Now, heroic virtue is exercised conjointly with the corresponding gift and, as it is thus placed at the service of charity, something of the impulse of this theological virtue is found in it.

Moreover, as the acts of the gifts depend on the inspiration of the Holy Ghost, the Christian hero remains very humble like a child of God who continually looks toward his Father. In this respect he differs notably from the hero who is conscious of his personal strength, like the Stoic, and who aims at great things or exalts his personality instead of allowing the Lord to reign profoundly in him.

The distinctive marks of heroic virtue are dominated by charity toward those who make one suffer and by prayer for them. This consideration leads us to discuss the connection of the virtues from this higher point of view.

THE CONNECTION OF THE VIRTUES AND THEIR HEROIC DEGREE

To discern more clearly between heroic virtue, which comes from a great help from God, and certain deceptive appearances, we must consider, besides the four distinctive marks already indicated, the connection of the virtues in prudence and charity. Prudence, the driver of the virtues, directs the moral virtues that it may kindle in our sensible appetites and will the light of right reason and faith. We saw earlier in our study that in this work of direction acquired prudence is at the service of infused Charity, on its part, directs the acts of all the other virtues to God loved supremely, making them meritorious. This is why all the virtues, being connected in prudence and charity, grow together, says St. Thomas, like the five fingers of the hand, like the different parts of one and the same organism.²²⁴⁵ This point of doctrine is of primary importance in discerning heroic virtues, for there is extraordinary difficulty in practicing, especially at the same time, seemingly contradictory virtues, like fortitude and meekness, simplicity and prudence, perfect truthfulness and the discretion which knows how to keep a secret.

Difficulty in practicing simultaneously virtues that are so unlike springs from the fact that each one of us is determined by his

temperament in one direction rather than in another. A person naturally inclined to meekness is but little inclined to fortitude; a naturally simple person sometimes carries simplicity to naivete and a lack of prudence; one who is very frank does not know how to answer an indiscreet question relative to something about which he should keep silent; one who is inclined to mercy will at times lack the firmness which justice or the defense of truth demands. Each one's temperament is determined in one direction; *natura determinatur ad unum*, the ancients used to say. All must climb toward the summit of perfection by opposite slopes; the meek must learn to become strong, and the strong to become meek. Thus the acquired and the infused virtues should complete man's excellent natural inclinations and combat the numerous defects which sully his moral character. Were we to count all the virtues annexed to the moral and theological virtues, we would discover that there are about forty of them to be practiced, and that each one occupies a middle position between two opposing defects to be avoided, as fortitude between cowardliness and temerity. It is essential to know how to play the keyboard of the virtues without sounding false notes, without confounding meekness with pusillanimity, and magnanimity with pride.

Hence the importance of the connection of the virtues and the difficulty there is in practicing them all at the same time, or practically so, in order that the equilibrium or harmony of moral life may be preserved *fortiter et suaviter*.

It also follows that a virtue exists in the heroic degree only if the others exist in a proportionate degree, at least in *praeparatione animi*, that is, in such a way that they can be practiced should the occasion arise. Thus the deeper the root of a tree is, the loftier is the highest of its branches.²²⁴⁶

Therefore one must possess lofty charity, eminent love of God and neighbor, and also great prudence, aided by the gift of counsel, in order to have simultaneously a high degree of fortitude and meekness, perfect love of truth and justice joined to great mercy for those who have gone astray. God alone, who unites all perfections in Himself, can grant that His servants unite them also in their lives. This is why St. Paul asserts this connection when he says of the charity poured forth in our hearts by the Holy Ghost: "Charity is patient, is kind: charity envieth not, dealeth not perversely, is not puffed up, is not ambitious, seeketh not her own, is not provoked to anger, thinketh no evil; rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth with the truth; beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things."²²⁴⁷

Likewise Benedict XIV declares: "The heroic degree, properly so called, demands the connection of all the moral virtues, and although pagans have excelled in one virtue or another, like love of country, it is not evident that they had the heroic degree properly so called, which cannot be conceived without great love of God and neighbor and the other virtues which accompany charity."²²⁴⁸

This admirable harmony of the virtues appears especially in our Lord, particularly during the Passion. In Him, together with His heroic love of God and immense mercy for sinners, which led Him to pray for His executioners, we see the greatest love of truth and uncompromising justice. In Him are united the most profound humility and the loftiest magnanimity, heroic fortitude in selfforgetfulness and the greatest meekness. Our Savior's humanity thus appears as the spotless mirror in which the divine perfections are reflected.²²⁴⁹

The connection of the virtues likewise enables us to distinguish as Benedict XIV points out,²²⁵⁰ between true and false martyrs. The latter endure their torments through pride and obstinacy in error whereas only true martyrs unite to heroic fortitude that meekness which leads them, in imitation of our Lord, to pray for their executioners. In their martyrdom, St. Stephen and St. Peter Martyr exemplified this teaching, showing us, in consequence, that their constancy was true Christian fortitude, united to the gift of fortitude, in the service of faith and charity. In them especially we have living examples of the four characteristics of heroic virtue explained above: to accomplish very difficult acts, promptly, with holy joy, and not only once, but every time that circumstances demand such action. To act in this manner requires a special intervention on the part of God who sustains His servants and who, in extreme circumstances, gives extreme graces.

We must insist on the point that the heroic degree of virtue thus defined is relative to different ages of life.²²⁵¹ Heroic virtue in children is judged in relation to the common strength of virtuous children of the same age. If certain grown persons are morally very small, there are little children who by reason of their virtues are very mature. Scripture declares: "Out of the mouth of infants and of sucklings Thou hast perfected praise."²²⁵² Christ reminded the chief priests and the scribes of this passage when they grew indignant at the children who were crying in the temple: "Hosanna to the Son of David."²²⁵³ And if the faith of little ones is at times an example for their elders, as much must be said of their confidence and love.

An example of such virtue is the heroism of little four-year-old Nellie of Ireland, whose well-known life written some years ago, aroused wonder and delight in Pope Pius X.²²⁵⁴ Tortured by caries of the bone which ate away her jaw, she used to press her crucifix to her heart in order to endure her sufferings; tears streaming down her cheeks, she accepted all her suffering, repeating unceasingly: "See how Holy God suffered for me!"

In 1909 little Guglielmina Tacchi Marconi, known in Pisa for her extraordinary love for the poor, died just as heroically.²²⁵⁵ In the streets she used to watch for the poor in order to assist them; at table she could not eat if they lacked anything. She died at the age of eleven, after seven months of torture by endocarditis; throughout this period she was never guilty of a pout or a caprice. From the very first day, though she was never again to know an hour of peaceful sleep, she contented herself with

repeating with great confidence: “All for the love of Jesus!” After her first Communion, made just before she died, she remained for a long time as if in ecstasy, and died exclaiming: “Come, Jesus, come.”

Another striking example is the martyrdom of the three little Japanese boys, canonized by Pope Pius IX in 1861. One of them, thirteen years of age, made the following reply to the governor who urged him to apostatize: “How foolish I would be to give up today certain and eternal goods for uncertain and passing goods!” Another, Louis Ibragi, twelve years of age, died on his cross singing the *Laudate, pueri, Dominum*.^{[2256](#)} On reading the account of these heroic acts performed by children from ten to twelve years of age and even less, and recalling the sublime words that several of them uttered before dying, one recognizes in them a wisdom incomparably superior in its simplicity and humility to the often pretentious complexity of human knowledge. In it is evident an eminent degree of the gift of wisdom, proportionate to the charity of these little servants of God, who were great by the heroic testimony they gave Him even unto death.^{[2257](#)}

Heroic and Contemplative Faith

“This is the victory which overcometh the world, our faith.”

I John 5:4

Since we have studied the heroic degree of the virtues in general, it will be profitable next to consider that of faith and the principal virtues in particular. We shall thus form an accurate idea of perfect Christian life according to the common teaching of the Church. There is no room for discussion in these matters, for they are the great common grounds of sanctity on which all theologians agree.

This description of the signs of the heroic degree of the principal virtues may be very useful in the beatification of the servants of God. A knowledge of these signs will also make clear why in these causes the Church does not seek to establish whether the servants of God in question had infused contemplation under a more or less determined form; it is sufficient to see that they had heroic faith, the signs of which we shall examine, since in them are often visible the fruits of contemplation, which makes such souls live in an almost continual conversation with God.

Heroic faith is not only the living faith, vivified by charity, which is found in all the just; it is eminent faith which has for its principal characters firmness of adherence to the most obscure mysteries, promptness in the rejection of error, penetration, which makes it contemplate all things in the light of divine revelation, while living profoundly by revealed mysteries.²²⁵⁸ Thereby it is victorious over the spirit of the world, as is evident especially in times of persecution.²²⁵⁹

THE FIRMNESS OF ITS ADHERENCE

When we spoke of the passive purification of the spirit, we saw that faith must be very firm to overcome the strong temptations which then present themselves. We stated, ²²⁶⁰ on the one hand, that during this painful period the gift of understanding vividly enlightens the soul on the grandeur of the divine perfections, on infinite justice, as well as on the gratuitous character of the favors of mercy toward the elect. In consequence the soul asks itself how infinite justice can be intimately harmonized with infinite mercy. On the other hand, the devil tells it that infinite justice is excessively rigorous and that mercy is arbitrary. But the faithful soul, which is purified in this crucible, rises above these temptations, and divine grace convinces it that the darkness found in these mysteries comes from a light too great for the weak eyes of the spirit. Hence, in spite of the fluctuations of the lower part of the intellect, at its summit faith not only remains firm but daily grows stronger. In this darkness it rises toward the heights of God, just as at night we glimpse the heights of the firmament, which remain invisible during the day.

This firmness of faith then manifests itself more and more by love for the word of God contained in Holy Scripture, by the cult of tradition preserved in the writings of the fathers, by perfect adherence to even the most minute details of the doctrine proposed by the Church, by docility to the directions of the supreme shepherd, the vicar of Jesus Christ. This firmness of faith appears especially in the martyrs, and also, during great conflicts of opinion, in those who, far from vacillating, are capable of sacrificing their selflove in order to keep immutably to the right road.

In the practical order, this firmness of perfect faith is also evident when the servants of God, faced with the most painful and unforeseen events, are not astonished at the unsearchable ways of Providence, disconcerting to reason. Of this firm faith Abraham gave evidence when he prepared to sacrifice his son Isaac, in spite of the fact that God Himself had promised him that from this Son was to spring his posterity, the multitude of believers. In the Epistle to the Hebrews, St. Paul says: “By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered Isaac: and he that had received the promises, offered up his only begotten son.... Accounting that God is able to raise up even from the dead. Whereupon also he received him.”²²⁶¹ This was a remote figure of the sacrifice of Christ.

This heroic obedience emanated from heroic faith. In the practical affairs of daily life as well as in the mysteries which we must believe, the obscurity of certain ways of God comes from a light too strong for our weak eyes. So in the life of Christ, His passion was at one and the same time the darkest hour, considered from a worldly point of view, and the most luminous from a spiritual point of view. This is what made St. Philip Neri say with admirable firmness of faith: “I thank Thee, Lord God, with all my heart that things are not going as I wish, but as Thou dost.” In Isaias the Lord says: “My thoughts are not your thoughts: nor your ways My ways.”²²⁶² These words are sometimes quoted to emphasize the disconcerting character of certain ways of God; but in this passage of Isaias, it is a question especially of the divine mercy which comes to us in these astounding ways. In the same chapter the Lord says: “All you that thirst, come to the waters.... Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unjust man

his thoughts, and let him return to the Lord, and He will have mercy on him, and to our God; for He is bountiful to forgive.... And as the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and return no more thither, but soak the earth,... so shall My word be, which shall go forth from My mouth. It shall not return to Me void, but it shall do whatsoever I please.... For you shall go out with joy, and be led forth with peace.”²²⁶³ The firmness of the faith of the true servants of God makes them see, but a little indistinctly, that the most disconcerting trials are directed by Providence to their sanctification, their salvation, and that of many souls.

PROMPTNESS IN REJECTING ERROR

Heroic and contemplative faith is characterized not only by firmness in adherence, but by promptness in rejecting error. It not only immediately spurns the false maxims of the world that cloak themselves in deceiving formulas, but it quickly perceives errors that are small in appearance, but that may become the cause of a great deviation; a slight deviation at the summit of an angle becomes great when its sides are prolonged. Thus, for example, when Jansenism was leading some theologians astray, St. Vincent de Paul, through his great spirit of faith, immediately grasped the error of this doctrine, so opposed to the divine mercy, which kept the faithful away from Holy Communion. He denounced this error to Rome through love for the word of God, which it altered, and for souls, which it was leading astray.

Promptness in rejecting every source of deviation is shown in the practical order by the way a person makes his confession, that is, without routine, with a clear view of his sins, and perfect sincerity that avoids every attenuation, as if he were reading in the book of life, which will be open to his gaze after death.

Promptness of faith in rejecting error causes the servants of God great suffering when they see souls being lost. After disciplining himself for those to whom he was to preach, St. Dominic used often to say in his nocturnal prayers: “O my God, what will become of sinners? “

Thence is born great zeal for the propagation of the faith in the missions and in countries where faith was once alive but now is lamentably declining. This zeal is ardent but not bitter or harsh; it manifests itself chiefly by fervent and almost continual prayer, which should be the soul of the apostolate.

THE PENETRATION WHICH CAUSES EVERYTHING TO BE SEEN IN THE LIGHT OF REVELATION

Perfect faith makes the soul see everything in the light of Scripture and, as it were, with the eye of God. Possessed of this degree of faith, it sees with increasing clearness all that has been revealed about the majesty of God, the divine perfections, the three Persons of the Blessed Trinity, the redeeming Incarnation, the intimate life of the Church, and eternal life. Under the same supernatural light with increasing clarity the soul sees itself, its qualities, and its weaknesses, and also the value of graces received. Similarly, in peace it considers other souls, their frailty and their generosity; hence it judges agreeable or painful events in relation to the end of our journey toward eternity. Judgment rises above sensible things and above the purely rational aspect of these events in order to attain though indistinctly, God’s supernatural plan.

St. Catherine of Siena often insists on this point in her *Dialogue*. Speaking of the perfect, the Lord says there:

She [the soul] would be illuminated to see that I, the primary and sweet Truth, grant condition, and time, and place, and consolations, and tribulations as they may be needed for your salvation, and to complete the perfection to which I have elected the soul. And she would see that I give everything through love, and that, therefore, with love and reverence she should receive everything.²²⁶⁴

Those who belong to the third state... deem themselves worthy of the troubles and stumblingblocks caused them by the world, and of the privation of their own consolation, and indeed of whatever circumstance happens to them.... They have known and tasted in the light My eternal will, which wishes naught else but your good, and gives and permits these troubles in order that you should be sanctified in Me.²²⁶⁵...

With this light the souls in the unitive state love Me, because love follows the intellect, and the more it knows the more can it love. Thus the one feeds the other.²²⁶⁶

The perfect soul thus attains to a penetrating faith, which enters the depths of the mystery of Christ, of the Son of God made man and crucified for our salvation. We read on this subject in the same *Dialogue*: “Such as these follow the Immaculate Lamb, My onlybegotten Son, who was both blessed and sorrowful on the cross. He was sorrowful in that He bore the cross of the body, suffering pain and the cross of desire, in order to satisfy for the guilt of the human race, and He was blessed because the divine nature, though united with the human, could suffer no pain, but always kept His soul in a state of blessedness, being revealed without a veil to her.”²²⁶⁷ Likewise, says St. Catherine of Siena, the intimate friends of the Lord Jesus suffer at the sight of sin, which offends God and ravages souls, but they are happy at the same time because no one can take away their charity, which constitutes their happiness and beatitude. Thus to the gaze of the servants of God there appear more clearly the infinite value of the Mass, the worth of the real presence of our Savior in the tabernacle, the grandeur of the intimate life of the Church, which lives by the thought, the love, the will of Christ. Everything takes on a true value in the liturgy, which is like the song of the

Spouse accompanying the great prayer of Christ, perpetuated by the sacrifice of our altars.

This penetrating and contemplative faith leads man to rejoice in the triumphs of the Church, to see in men not rivals or indifferent persons, but brothers bought by the blood of Christ, members of His mystical body. St. Vincent de Paul, going to the assistance of abandoned children or of prisoners condemned to the galleys, had a high degree of contemplative faith which inspired his whole apostolate.

Perfect faith leads the just man always to base his decisions not on human but on supernatural motives. It gives life a superior radiant simplicity, which is like the reflection of the divine simplicity. Sometimes it shines forth on the countenances of the saints, which are as if illumined by a celestial light. One day St. Dominic, all unsuspecting, escaped an ambush prepared by his adversaries to bring about his death. When those who were awaiting him in a lonely place in order to kill him, saw him approaching, they were so struck by the light illuminating his countenance that they did not dare to lay hands on him. St. Dominic was thus saved, as someone has said, by his contemplation, which radiated over his features; and with him was saved the Order he was to found.

THE VICTORY OF HEROIC FAITH OVER THE SPIRIT OF THE WORLD

St. John writes in his First Epistle: "Whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world. And this is the victory which overcometh the world, our faith. Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?"²²⁶⁸

The victory of heroic faith appears even in the Old Testament, as St. Paul says: "By faith, Abraham, when he was tried, offered Isaac.... By faith also of things to come, Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau. By faith Jacob dying, blessed each of the sons of Joseph... By faith he [Moses] left Egypt, not fearing the fierceness of the king: for he endured as seeing Him that is invisible.... By faith they [the Israelites] passed through the Red Sea.... The prophets... by faith conquered kingdoms, wrought justice, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions [like Daniel], quenched the violence of fire [like the three children in the furnace].... They were stoned, they were cut asunder, they were tempted, they were put to death by the sword... being in want, distressed, afflicted: of whom the world was not worthy."²²⁶⁹ This is what makes St. Paul say in the same epistle: "And therefore,... let us run by patience to the fight proposed to us: looking on Jesus,... who having joy set before Him, endured the cross, despising the shame, and now sitteth on the right hand of the throne of God.... For you have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin."²²⁷⁰

The numerous martyrs who have died in Spain since July, 1936, gave our Lord this testimony of blood; they won the victory of heroic faith over the spirit of the world or the spirit of evil. Without going as far as the shedding of blood, this victory is won by the faith of all the saints: in the last century by that of the Cure of Ars, Don Bosco, St. Joseph Cottolengo, and nearer our day by that of St. Teresa of the Child Jesus, and of many very generous souls whose names we do not know, but whose oblation ascends toward God like the sweet odor of incense. "They that sow in tears shall reap in joy."²²⁷¹ In this way souls are configured to Christ: first of all, to His childhood, then to His hidden life, in a measure to His apostolic life, and finally to His sorrowful life, before sharing in His glorious life in heaven.

Heroic Hope and Abandonment

“Against hope... in hope.”
Rom. 4: 18

Heroic hope is the eminent degree of this virtue, which makes us tend toward God, the object of eternal beatitude, relying, in order to reach Him, on the help He promised us.²²⁷² The formal motive of infused and theological hope is God Himself ever helpful, *Deus auxilians*, or helpful Omnipotence.

As long as the Christian has not reached perfection, his hope lacks firmness; it is more or less unstable, in the sense that the soul sometimes allows itself to slip into presumption when all is going well, and to fall subsequently into a certain discouragement when some undertaking does not succeed. Above these fluctuations, heroic hope is characterized by invincible firmness and trusting abandonment, sustained by unwavering fidelity to duty. The heroic confidence of the saints is also shown by its effects: it restores the courage of others and arouses hunger and thirst after the justice of God.

THE INVINCIBLE FIRMNESS OF PERFECT HOPE

The Council of Trent tells us: “We should all have a most firm hope in the help of God; for if we do not resist His grace, as He has begun the work of salvation in us, He will finish it, working in us both to will and to accomplish, as St. Paul says (Phil. 2: 13).”²²⁷³

The invincible firmness of hope appears, we have seen, in the passive purification of the spirit when, to make us hope purely in Him, the Lord permits every human help to disappear. Then occur rebuffs, at times calumnies, which give rise to a certain mistrust in those who until then had been helpful. In addition, the tried soul has a clearer view of its own wretchedness; it is likewise at times depressed by illness, and must overcome strong temptations to discouragement or even to despair, proceeding from the enemy of all good. The soul must then hope supernaturally and heroically against all human hope, as St. Paul says of Abraham, who, although nearly a hundred years old, did not despair of becoming the father of a great number of nations, according to the promise which had been given to him: “So shall thy seed be.”²²⁷⁴

If this trial is courageously endured, hope grows stronger and stronger during it and is increased tenfold. However, it does not give us absolute certitude that individually we shall be saved, since that would require a special revelation;²²⁷⁵ but we hope increasingly for salvation with a certitude of tendency. Just as under the direction of Providence, the animal’s instinct tends infallibly toward its end, the swallow toward the country to which it should return, so under the direction of faith in the divine promises we tend infallibly toward eternal life.²²⁷⁶

This firmness in tending toward eternal life should be invincible because of the formal motive on which it rests: God who always aids us, according to His promises. In spite of rebuffs, contradictions, the sight of our wretchedness and our sins, we should always hope in God, who has promised His help to those who ask Him for it with humility, trust, and perseverance. “Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and you shall find; knock, and it shall be opened to you.... And which of you, if he ask his father bread, will he give him a stone? Or a fish, will he for a fish give him a serpent?... If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father from heaven give the good Spirit to them that ask Him!”²²⁷⁷ And if we must ask conditionally for temporal goods, in the measure in which they are useful to our salvation, we should ask unconditionally, humbly to be sure, but with absolute trust, for the graces necessary to persevere. And as St. Luke relates in the text just quoted, we should thus ask not only for the graces necessary for our sanctification, but for the Holy Ghost Himself, the gift par excellence. He is sent anew when the soul passes from one degree of charity to another that is notably higher, as it must be, for the soul to pass through the trials which are ordered precisely to this progress. Hope thus purified becomes invincible, according to the words of St. Paul, which have sustained the martyrs: “If God be for us, who is against us?”²²⁷⁸ The Lord has more than once said to His saints: “You shall lack help only when I lack power.” St. Teresa of the Child Jesus used to say: “Even if I were the greatest sinner on earth, I should not have less trust in God, for my hope does not rest upon my innocence, but on God’s mercy and omnipotence.”

St. Paul grasped all the sublimity of this formal motive of hope when he wrote: “And lest the greatness of the revelations should exalt me, there was given me a sting of my flesh, an angel of Satan, to buffet me. For which thing thrice I besought the Lord that it might depart from me. And He said to me: My grace is sufficient for thee; for power is made perfect in infirmity. Gladly, therefore, will I glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may dwell in me. For which cause I please myself in

my infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ. For when I am weak, then am I powerful";²²⁷⁹ that is, I cease to trust in myself, that I may trust in God: "I can do all things in Him who strengtheneth me."²²⁸⁰ It is expedient to say to oneself then, as a holy soul used to say: Of ourselves we are nothing, but through our Lord we are something, since He loves us and redeemed us by His blood.

The story is told that one day St. Philip Neri went through the cloisters of his monastery exclaiming in a loud voice: "I am in despair, I am in despair." His spiritual sons, astonished, said to him: "Is it possible, you, Father, who so many times have restored our trust?" Leaping joyfully, St. Philip replied in his characteristic way: "Yes, left to myself, I am hopeless; but by the grace of our Lord, I still have confidence." He had doubtless had a very strong temptation to discouragement, which he overcame in this fashion. He thus experienced the truth that one must be crushed in order to grow, to be configured to Him of whom Isaias says: "He was wounded for our iniquities."²²⁸¹ St. Paul of the Cross had the same experience over a long period of years when he had to suffer in order to unify the Order of Passionists which he had founded, an order that was to bear especially the marks of our Savior's passion.²²⁸²

TRUSTING ABANDONMENT AND UNWAVERING FIDELITY

Heroic hope manifests itself not only by its firmness, but by trusting abandonment to Providence and to the omnipotent goodness of God. Perfect abandonment differs from quietism because it is accompanied by hope and unwavering fidelity to duty, even in little things, from moment to moment, according to our Lord's words: "He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in that which is greater."²²⁸³ He will receive the divine help to undergo martyrdom if necessary. Unwavering fidelity to the will of God signified in the duty of the present moment prepares the soul to abandon itself with entire confidence to the as yet unrevealed divine will of good pleasure, on which depend its future and eternity. The more faithful the soul is to the divine light received, the more it can abandon itself wholly to Providence, to divine mercy and omnipotence. Thus are harmonized in the soul the activity of fidelity and the passivity of abandonment, above restless, fruitless agitation and slothful quiet. At those times when all may seem lost, the soul repeats with the Psalmist: "The Lord ruleth me; and I shall want nothing.... For though I should walk in the midst of the shadow of death, I will fear no evils, for Thou art with me. Thy rod and Thy staff, they have comforted me."²²⁸⁴

In its greatest difficulties, the tried soul remembers the holy man Job, who, after losing all he possessed, exclaimed: "The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away. As it hath pleased the Lord, so is it done. Blessed be the name of the Lord."²²⁸⁵ The tried soul should also repeat the words of the Book of Proverbs: "Have confidence in the Lord with all thy heart, and lean not upon thy own prudence. In all thy ways think on Him, and He will direct thy steps."²²⁸⁶ The Psalmist likewise says: "In Thee, O Lord, have I hoped, let me never be confounded."²²⁸⁷ When all seemed lost, St. Teresa used to say: "Lord, Thou knowest all things, Thou canst do all, and Thou lovest me." To give oneself up to His love and in advance to accept all from this love rests the soul and makes it victorious over temptations to murmur. This temptation is sometimes formulated as follows: "O Lord, why dost Thou not come to my help?" We should remember that nothing escapes Providence, that the Lord watches over us, that there is a precious grace in the cross which He sends us, and that "His commiserations have not failed."²²⁸⁸ St. John of the Cross used often to say: "O heavenly hope, which obtains as much as it hopes for!"

Heroic hope, moreover, rests more and more on the infinite merits of our Savior, on the value of the blood He shed for us. No matter what happens, even though the world should crumble, we should hope in the good Shepherd, who gave His life for His sheep, and in God the Father, who, after having given us His own Son, cannot refuse to come to the aid of those who have recourse to Him.²²⁸⁹

In *The Dialogue* of St. Catherine of Siena, the Lord says: "This true and holy hope is more or less perfect, according to the degree of love which the soul has for Me, and it is in the same measure that it tastes My Providence."²²⁹⁰ This spiritual taste is greatly superior to sensible consolations. In fact, not only does the perfect soul believe in Providence, but more and more discovers its manifestations where it least expected them. It tastes Providence by the gift of wisdom which shows it all things in God, even painful and unforeseen events, making it foresee the higher good for which He permits them.

In the same chapter of *The Dialogue* we read: "Those who serve Me disinterestedly, with the sole hope of pleasing Me, taste My Providence more than those who expect a recompense for their service in the joy which they find in Me.... Perfect and imperfect are the object of My attentions; I shall not fail any, provided they have not the presumption to hope in themselves."²²⁹¹

The more disinterested we are, the more we taste Providence see it in the course of our life, abandon ourselves to it and to the direction of our two great Mediators, who do not cease to watch over us. With trust in our Lord grows that in Mary, universal Mediatrix. She, who at the foot of the cross made the greatest act of hope when all seemed lost, merited to be called Mary Help of Christians, Our Lady of Perpetual Help. We know that frequent recourse to her is a special sign of predestination.

That the heroic confidence of the saints revives the hope of their companions is particularly evident in the lives of the founders of religious orders. When they had neither money nor human support, when vocations were lacking or slow in coming, when they met with scarcely anything but mistrust and contradiction, they placed their confidence in God and lifted up the hope of their first sons, who remained faithful.²²⁹²

On more than one occasion miracles have rewarded their trust. When there was only a loaf of bread for the brethren of the convent of Bologna, St. Dominic gave the loaf to a poor man asking for alms. The saint put his trust in God, and angels came from heaven to bring the necessary bread to the religious.

Blessed Raymond of Capua relates that St. Catherine of Siena “was accustomed to say to us when some one of my brethren and I feared some peril: ‘Why do you concern yourselves? Let divine Providence act. When your fears are greatest, it is always watching over you and will not cease to provide for your salvation.’”²²⁹³ Such is perfect, entirely trustful abandonment, united to sustained fidelity to daily duty.

The Lord Himself said to St. Catherine of Siena during very trying times: “My daughter, think of Me; if thou dost so, I shall unceasingly think of thee.”²²⁹⁴ This trust in God enabled the saint to restore the courage of her companions during the exceptional mission entrusted to her of bringing the pope from Avignon to Rome, a mission which she accomplished in the midst of the greatest difficulties. The Sovereign Pontiff’s entourage did everything possible to discredit the saint; in spite of this almost incredible opposition, the daughter of the dyer of Siena, trusting implicitly in our Lord, succeeded perfectly in her task.

How many discouraged souls, like young Nicholas Tuldo who was condemned to death, she raised up!

When she offered herself for the reformation of the Church, the Lord gave her the following counsel for herself and her spiritual children: “You ought to offer to Me the vessel of many fatiguing actions, in whatever way I send them to you, choosing, after your own fashion, neither place, nor time, nor actions. Therefore the vessel should be full, that is, you should endure all those fatigues with affection of love and true patience, supporting the defects of your neighbor, with hatred and displeasure of sin.... So, endure manfully, even unto death, and this will be a sign to Me that you love Me; and you should not turn your faces away and look askance at the plough, through fear of any creature or of any tribulation; rather, in such tribulations should you rejoice.... After your sorrow I will give you most sustaining consolation, with much substance in the reformation of the holy Church.”²²⁹⁵

The Lord sustains the hope of His saints by words like those He addressed to Joan of Arc in her prison: “Do not fail to esteem your martyrdom; as a result of it, you will finally come to the kingdom of paradise.” The saints place their trust more and more in helpful omnipotence, saying to themselves: “God is stronger than all”; and their immolation itself is a triumph which configures them to our Savior. With Him they thus win the victory over sin and the devil. To persevere in the struggle, they ask the Lord to give them the sincere desire to share in His sacred humiliations, and in this desire to find strength, peace, and occasionally joy that they may revive the courage of those about them.

In the same proportion as charity grows, the fear of suffering diminishes and that of sin increases without weakening trust. The more closely we are united to God by charity, the more we fear sin, which would separate us from Him, and the more we trust in Him who loves us and draws us to Himself.²²⁹⁶

Heroic Charity

We shall explain the nature of heroic charity by recalling the definition of this virtue. Charity is the infused theological virtue which makes us love God for Himself and more than ourselves, because He is infinitely good in Himself, infinitely better than we are, and than all His gifts. It also makes us love our neighbor in God and for God, because God loves him and as God loves him. Charity is thus a friendship between the soul and God, a communion of our love with His and a communion of souls in the love of God. We must, therefore, consider heroic charity first toward God, and secondly toward our neighbor.

HEROIC CHARITY TOWARD GOD PERFECT CONFORMITY TO HIS WILL AND LOVE OF THE CROSS

Heroic charity toward God manifests itself in the first place by an ardent desire to please Him. In fact, to love someone not for oneself but for himself, is to wish him well, to wish what is suitable for him and pleasing to him. To love God heroically is, in the midst of even the greatest difficulties, to wish that His holy will be accomplished and His reign profoundly established in souls.

This holy desire to please God is a form of affective charity, which is proved by effective charity, or by conformity to the divine will, in the practice of all the virtues. The soul thus reaches unswerving fidelity in little things and in great things, or what is most difficult.

Heroic love of God is shown, we have seen, in the passive purification of the spirit, when it is a question of loving God for Himself, without any consolation, in great and protracted aridity, in spite of temptations to disgust, acedia, and murmuring, when the Lord seems to withdraw His gifts and leave the soul in anxiety. God is for this reason none the less infinitely good in Himself and deserves to be loved purely for Himself. If then, in spite of such prolonged dryness, the soul loves to be alone with God, especially before the Blessed Sacrament, and if it still continues to pray, if in spite of everything its life remains a perpetual prayer, this is a sign of heroic love of God.

As St. Francis de Sales²²⁹⁷ shows, heroic conformity to the divine will appears when the soul receives lovingly every agreeable or painful occurrence as coming either from the positive will of God, or from a divine permission directed toward a higher good. It then sees with ever greater clearness the truth of the words of Ecclesiasticus: “Good things and evil, life and death, poverty and riches, are from God.”²²⁹⁸ The soul here becomes deeply convinced that God makes use even of the malice of men, for example, of persecutors, as an occasion of merit for those who wish to live only for Him. Thus Job accepted adversity, and in the same way David bore the insults of Semei.²²⁹⁹

In the greatest difficulties, the saints, while doing what is in their power, say: “It will be as God wishes.”

To this sign is added a confirmation: namely, one who thus renounces his own will and adheres heroically to the will of God finds a holy joy in this adherence. In conforming his will more and more to God’s will, he has all that he wishes. He experiences the truth of the Psalmist’s words: “O Lord, Thou hast crowned us, as with a shield of Thy good will.”²³⁰⁰ This is what the martyrs have particularly experienced.

In his explanation of the Canticle of Canticles, St. Bernard describes the ascending degrees of heroic charity as follows: “Divine love leads to an unceasing search for God, to continual labor for Him; it bears indefatigably all trials in union with Christ; it gives a true thirst for God; it makes us run rapidly toward Him; it gives us a holy boldness and an undaunted audacity; it attaches us inseparably to God; it burns and consumes us with a very sweet ardor for Him; finally, in heaven, it likens us completely to Him.”²³⁰¹

These degrees of perfect charity are explained in a short work attributed to St. Thomas,²³⁰² and also by St. John of the Cross in *The Dark Night*,²³⁰³ where he shows that the second last degree is the transforming union, the prelude of that of heaven. “The Apostles,” he says, “experienced this sweetness of ardent love when the Holy Ghost descended visibly upon them.”²³⁰⁴

The greatest sign of heroic charity toward God, is love of the cross. The patience and conformity to the divine will of which we have spoken, lead to this love.

In *The Dialogue* of St. Catherine of Siena, the Lord says: “It now remains to be told thee how it can be seen that souls have arrived at perfect love. This is seen by the same sign that was given to the holy disciples after they had received the Holy Spirit, when they came forth from the house, and fearlessly announced the doctrine of My Word, My only-begotten Son, not fearing pain, but rather glorying therein. They did not mind going before the tyrants of the world to announce to them the truth, for the glory and praise of My name.”²³⁰⁵

In the same *Dialogue* we read: “Such as these,... as if enamored of My honor, and famished for the food of souls, run to the table of the most holy cross.”²³⁰⁶ “They slacken not their pace on account of the persecutions, injuries, or pleasures of the world. They pass by all these things,... their affection clothed in the affection of charity, and eating the food of souls with true and perfect patience, which patience is a sign that the soul is in perfect love, loving without any consideration of self.”²³⁰⁷ “Such as these do not feel any separation from Me.... I remain continually both by grace and feeling in their souls.”²³⁰⁸

In other words, the eminent exercise of charity is accompanied in a proportionate degree by the act of the gift of wisdom, which enables us, says St. Thomas,²³⁰⁹ to know God present in us in a quasiexperimental manner. This is truly the mystical life, the summit of the normal development of grace and the prelude of the life of heaven. This summit cannot exist without love of the cross, and love of the cross does not exist without the contemplation of the mystery of the redemption, of the mystery of Christ dying for love of us.

Consequently, in *The Dialogue*, the Lord, speaking to St. Catherine of Siena for herself and for her spiritual children, says: “It is right for thee, and My other servants who have learned My truth in this way, to sustain, even unto death, many tribulations and injuries and insults in word and deed, for the glory and praise of My name; thus wilt thou endure and suffer pains”;²³¹⁰ that is, with patience, gratitude, and love.

Such are the great signs of heroic love of God: perfect conformity to His will in trials and love of the cross. There is also another sign, perfect charity toward one’s neighbor, which we shall now discuss.

HEROIC CHARITY TOWARD ONE’S NEIGHBOR: THE ARDENT DESIRE FOR HIS SALVATION AND RADIATING GOODNESS TOWARD ALL

Charity leads us to love our neighbor in God and for Him; that is, because God loves him and as God loves him. It makes us desire that our neighbor may belong entirely to God and glorify Him eternally. Heroic love of neighbor already exists when one promptly dominates strong temptations to envy, discord, isolation, so different from solitude; likewise when one quickly surmounts temptations to presumption, which incline one, in the wake of certain insults, to wish to get along without the help of others—of friends, director, superiors.

Perfect charity appears when, in the midst of great difficulties, one loves one’s neighbor, *mente, ore, et opere*, that is, judging him with benevolence, speaking well of him, helping him in his necessity, perfectly pardoning offenses, and making oneself all to all. This charity is still more obvious if by preference one seeks out, as St. Vincent de Paul did, friendless and fallen souls, poor, strayed, and gravely guilty creatures, in order to lift them up, rehabilitate them, and set them back on the road to heaven.

A chief characteristic of heroic love of neighbor is an ardent desire for the salvation of souls, a thirst for souls, which recalls Christ’s words on the cross: “I thirst.” St. John used to say: “My little children, let us not love in word nor in tongue, but in deed and in truth.”²³¹¹

Heroic love of neighbor led some saints to the point of wishing to sell themselves as slaves that they might deliver captives and thus rescue families from wretched poverty. This zeal inspired St. Paul to write: “I wished myself to be an anathema from Christ,²³¹² for my brethren, who are my kinsmen according to the flesh, who are Israelites.”²³¹³

This zeal inspired the apostolic activity of great missionaries, of St. Francis Xavier, St. Louis Bertrand, Las Casas, St. Peter Claver. Nearer our own day, it is the inspiration of apostles, like St. John Bosco, who are completely engrossed in bringing back to God the misguided masses in our Christian countries who no longer know the Gospel.

Another sign of heroic love of neighbor is radiating goodness toward all amid the greatest difficulties, according to the evangelical beatitude: “Blessed are the peacemakers,” that is, those who not only preserve peace in most difficult moments, but who give it to others and hearten the most troubled. This eminent sign appears in Mary, the Consoler of the Afflicted, and in all those who resemble her. Our Lord says: “Love one another as I have loved you.”²³¹⁴ “By this shall all men know that you are My disciples.”²³¹⁵

Communicative goodness, love of neighbor carried even to daily and hidden sacrifice, is the indisputable mark of the presence of God in a soul. This goodness, which is as strong as it is gentle, sometimes leads one to correct others, but without bitterness, sharpness, or impatience. And that the correction may be effective, it points out the good, the salutary seed which should be developed in the one who deserves the reprimand. Then the person receiving the reproof feels that he is loved and understood; he takes courage. If the Blessed Virgin were to appear and tell us our defects, she would do so with such goodness that we would immediately accept her corrections and draw from them the strength to make progress.²³¹⁶

Perfect charity toward one’s neighbor springs from close union with God, and it leads one’s neighbor to this same union, according to our Savior’s words: “I pray... for them also who through their word shall believe in Me; that they all may be one, as Thou, Father in Me, and I in Thee.”²³¹⁷ The more united the soul is to God, the more it draws others to Him, never to itself. In the soul united to God, shines forth the divine goodness, which radiates, attracts powerfully and sweetly, and ends by triumphing over all obstacles.²³¹⁸

An incident from the life of St. Catherine of Siena will serve to illustrate this teaching. One day Peter Ventura, a Sienese involved in the affairs of the government, was brought to Catherine with his heart full of implacable hatred. “Peter,” Catherine said to him, “I take all your sins on myself, I shall do penance in your place. But grant me a favor; go to confession.” “I have just been to confession recently,” said the Sienese. “That is not true,” replied the saint, “it is seven years since you went to confession,” and, one by one, she enumerated all the sins of his life. Stupefied, Peter admitted his guilt, repented of his sins, and pardoned his enemies. By promising Peter Ventura that she would take his sins on herself and expiate them, the saint had truly offered herself as a victim, and the Lord required of His servant, or rather His spouse, expiation through suffering. She interpreted literally Christ’s words: “Love one another, as I have loved you.”

In the same heroic manner St. Catherine obtained the conversion of Andrea Mei, a Sienese invalid, who had grievously calumniated her. The saint with consummate devotion nursed this woman, who was being eaten by a cancer. The unfortunate creature had the sorry courage to impugn the virginal honor of her devoted nurse, and these evil remarks spread abroad. Catherine, however, did not cease to tend her with the same zeal. Her patience and humility triumphed over Andrea Mei. One day the saint, as she approached the sick woman’s bed, was surrounded by light, as if resplendent in glory; “Pardon!” cried the guilty woman. Catherine threw her arms around her neck, and their tears mingled. It was like the radiation of the divine goodness and the realization of our Savior’s words: “The glory which Thou hast given Me, I have given to them; that they may be one, as We also are one.”²³¹⁹

Two souls united in God by charity are like two candles whose flames unite and fuse.

Charity, which thus triumphs over wickedness, makes the saints share in the victory of Christ over sin and the devil. It is one of the glories of His mystical body; through it shine forth the grandeur of the life of the Church, its fruitfulness in every kind of good and of works of mercy. It is the confirmation of the divine origin of the Church.

The Heroic Degree of the Christian Moral Virtues

Since we cannot discuss here the heroic degree of each of the moral virtues in particular, we shall draw the inspiration for our selection especially from Christ's words: "Take up My yoke upon you, and learn of Me, because I am meek and humble of heart."²³²⁰ We shall consider first the heroic degree of humility and meekness. These virtues give the Christian tone we need to treat next of the heroic degree of fortitude, prudence, justice, and other virtues corresponding to the three evangelical counsels.

HEROIC HUMILITY AND MEEKNESS

Humility, which represses inordinate love of our own excellence, leads us to abase ourselves before the majesty of God and before what is of God in every creature.²³²¹ This virtue is heroic when it reaches the higher degrees described by St. Anselm²³²² and recalled by St. Thomas: "The third and fourth degrees regard the avowal of one's own deficiency: namely, that not merely one simply assert one's failing, but that one convince another of it. The other three degrees have to do with the appetite, which seeks, not outward excellence, but outward abasement, or bears it with equanimity, whether it consist of words or deeds.... We should especially be humble toward those who make us suffer, and this belongs to the fifth and sixth degrees; or the appetite may even go so far as lovingly to embrace external abasement,"²³²³ in order to be configured to our Lord, who, for love of our salvation, willed the final humiliations of the Passion.

Heroic humility led St. Peter to wish to be crucified head down; it led St. Francis of Assisi and St. Benedict Joseph Labre to rejoice in the worst treatment and to find therein a holy joy.

Perfect humility is manifested outwardly by a great habitual modesty. We read in Ecclesiasticus: "A man is known by his look, and a wise man... is known by his countenance. The attire of the body and the laughter of the teeth and the gait of the man, show what he is."²³²⁴ St. Paul says: "Let your modesty be known to all men."²³²⁵ It appears on a calm, humble countenance, little inclined to laughter, in a grave, simple, unaffected bearing, which shows that a man lives in the presence of God and does not interrupt his intimate conversation with Him. Thus the truly humble and modest man speaks of God by his conduct and even by his silence.²³²⁶

Heroic humility is accompanied by meekness in a proportionate degree. By this virtue man attains to complete self-mastery, to perfect domination of anger, when he does not return evil for evil, but triumphs over it by goodness.²³²⁷ The higher degrees of meekness consist in not being disturbed under injury, in experiencing a holy joy at the thought of the higher good it procures for one, and lastly in having compassion on the person who inflicts an injury, in suffering from the evil which it may cause him. Thus Jesus wept over Jerusalem, following its ingratitude; He was more sad over the wretchedness of the ungrateful city than over the cruel death He was about to undergo. The heroic meekness of Jesus is manifested especially by His prayer for His executioners.

HEROIC FORTITUDE AND MAGNANIMITY

In the perfect soul humility and meekness are accompanied by virtues contrary in appearance, but in reality complementary: fortitude and magnanimity. They are like the two opposite sides of a pointed arch, supporting each other.

Fortitude is the moral virtue which strengthens the soul in the pursuit of the difficult good so that it does not allow itself to be shaken by the greatest obstacles. It should dominate the fear of danger, fatigue, criticism, all that would paralyze our efforts toward the good. It prevents man from capitulating in a cowardly manner when he should fight; it also moderates audacity and untimely exaltation which would drive him to temerity.

Fortitude has two principal acts: to undertake courageously and to endure difficult things. The Christian should endure them for the love of God; it is more difficult to endure for a long time than in a moment of enthusiasm, to undertake courageously something difficult.²³²⁸

Fortitude is accompanied by patience to endure the sorrows of life without being disturbed and without murmuring, by longanimity which endures trials for a long time, and by constancy in good, which is opposed to obduracy in evil. To the virtue of fortitude is also linked that of magnanimity, which leads to the lofty practice of all the virtues,²³²⁹ avoiding pusillanimity and effeminacy, but without falling into presumption, vainglory, or ambition.

The gift of fortitude adds a superior perfection to the virtue of fortitude. It disposes us to receive the special inspirations of the Holy Ghost, which are given to sustain our courage in the presence of danger and to drive out worry over not being able to

accomplish a great duty or to endure trials. This gift makes us preserve, in spite of everything, “hunger and thirst after the justice of God.”²³³⁰

The heroic degree of the virtue of fortitude appears especially in martyrdom, undergone to give testimony to a truth of faith or to the grandeur of a Christian virtue. Outside of martyrdom, the virtue of fortitude, the gift of fortitude, patience, and magnanimity intervene each time that something heroic is to be accomplished or a great trial to be borne.

Christian fortitude differs from stoic fortitude inasmuch as it is accompanied by humility, meekness, and great simplicity. Simplicity is heroic when it has such love of the truth that it excludes absolutely all duplicity, every slightest lie, all simulation, every equivocation. It does not, however, lead a man to tell his every thought and feeling, and it knows very well how to keep a secret.

HEROIC PRUDENCE

People speak less of the heroic degree of prudence than of that of fortitude; nevertheless, in most difficult moments, this virtue also assumes a heroic character. Prudence it is that directs our actions toward the last end of life, by determining the golden mean of the moral virtues between deviations through excess and deficiency.²³³¹ It makes us avoid rash haste, inconsideration, indecision, and inconstancy in the pursuit of the good. It has, therefore, for its object practical truth or the truth to be placed in our actions. For this reason our Lord said to His disciples: “Be ye therefore wise as serpents and simple as doves.”²³³² There is certainly a real difficulty in always perfectly harmonizing these two virtues. They are indispensable to the Christian, with a characteristic unknown to the philosophers: the Christian, in fact, not only should be the perfect upright man who develops his personality in a human manner; he ought always to act as a child of God, in perfect dependence on Him. He should even increasingly recognize this dependence; the child, on the other hand, should, as it grows up, be self-sufficient and not depend on the help of its earthly father.

In its higher degree Christian prudence recognizes with clarity and penetration the true good which the child of God should effect, and it firmly directs the other virtues to make him accomplish this good in a holy manner.

This virtue is, therefore, absolutely necessary to those who tend to perfection, or to intimate union with God. They should aspire to have all the virtues in a lofty degree, which presupposes prudence in a proportionate degree, at least in what concerns personal sanctification. Evidently this virtue is especially necessary for those whose duty it is to advise and direct others.

When we have excessive confidence in our own prudence, for our purification God permits us to fail in tact and refinement, with the result that we suffer more or less visible rebuffs. He also permits at times a certain lack of memory, or failures in attention, which have more or less regrettable results and humiliate us.

After this purification, prudence may become heroic; it is then manifestly accompanied by the gift of counsel in an eminent degree. Through this gift we receive the inspirations which, particularly in difficult cases, give us a supernatural intuition of what it is advisable to do. We see this strikingly in the counsels which St. Catherine of Siena gave to the pope to bring him back from Avignon to Rome, and in her letters to princes in regard to political matters concerning religion.

Without reaching so high a degree, perfect prudence, united to the gift of counsel, makes us see what must be said and done in difficult moments: for example, when we are asked an indiscreet question and must reply at once without violating the truth or revealing a secret. If the soul is as a rule docile to the Holy Ghost, He will then give it a special inspiration enabling it to find the right answer. There are many such examples in times of persecution, in particular when priests, who exercise their ministry in secret, have to reply to extremely insidious and exacting questions. In such cases, heroic prudence is manifested.

The same is true when the Lord causes certain servants of His to undertake things that may seem imprudent to many. St. Alexius, on the evening of his marriage, received the inspiration to leave his wife and spend his life in solitude and prayer as a pilgrim to the greatest sanctuaries. He did so heroically, and at last returned to Rome, without making himself known in the home of his patrician father where his pious wife was living. He spent several years there as a poor man, sleeping under a staircase; only after his death did his wife learn his secret. This heroic life had not destroyed conjugal love in them, but had completely spiritualized and transformed it. In this exceptional situation, St. Alexius, living incognito in his father’s house, often mistreated by the servants, had to practice heroic prudence, united to the gift of counsel. The same is true of St. Francis of Assisi in his love of poverty, and likewise of those who, by a divine inspiration, undertake most difficult works, such as the complete rehabilitation of poor, fallen, criminal girls, finally making them religious consecrated to God.²³³³ These servants of God are thus at times led into most difficult situations, in which to act and not to act may seem to many equally imprudent. Then one must humbly beg the Lord for light, the inspirations of the gift of counsel, and must remain pliable and docile in the hands of God. Perfect prudence is, therefore, inseparable from continual prayer to obtain divine light. It also inclines man to listen to the good advice of those who can enlighten him. It represents perfect maturity of spirit.

In regard to the “extraordinary supernatural,” true prudence is circumspect. It does not reject *a priori*; it verifies the truth of the facts and pronounces on the matter only when obliged to do so, after often asking God for light. Superior prudence

manifests itself also in the examination of certain exceptional vocations.

The heroic degree of this virtue appears, therefore, especially in acts which, in the eyes of human wisdom, are imprudent, but which, in reality, show by their results that they are those of a higher prudence. Thus our Savior sent His twelve apostles to work without any human means for the conversion of the world. So, too, St. Dominic sent his first sons without resources into different parts of Europe where they founded centers of apostolic life which still subsist. This was an act of lofty prudence, evidently enlightened by the gift of counsel.

HEROIC JUSTICE

The justice in question here is not justice in the broad sense of the term, which designates the totality of the virtues, as when it is said of St. Joseph that he was a just man. The justice we are speaking of is the special virtue inclining our will always to render every man his due. Thus commutative justice establishes, according to just right, order between individuals by regulating exchanges. Distributive justice establishes order in society by distributing congruously to individuals goods of general utility, advantages, and duties. Legal or social justice establishes just laws in view of the common good and sees to their observance. Lastly, equity (*epicheia*) observes the spirit of laws even more than the letter, especially in exceptional cases where the rigorous application of the letter, of legality, would be too rigid and inhuman.

To form an idea of perfect justice, either acquired or infused we must bear in mind that this virtue forbids not only theft and fraud, but also lying or any voluntary word opposed to the truth, hypocrisy, simulation, the violation of a secret, insult to the honor or reputation of our neighbor by calumny, slander, or action. It also forbids rash judgment, derision, and raillery which unduly disparage our neighbor.

Our justice often has some alloy, when it is practiced at least partially from interested motives: for example, when a person pays a portion of his debts in order to avoid the costs of a lawsuit, or when he avoids lying partly because of the annoying consequences that might result from the lie. Justice, therefore, needs to be purified from all inferior alloy just as the other virtues do.

Perfect justice is necessary for those who aspire to close union with God, because they should become irreproachable in their dealings with others and practice toward them all the duties of justice and charity.

We read in Ecclesiasticus: "Strive for justice for thy soul, and even unto death fight for justice, and God will overthrow thy enemies for thee. Be not hasty in thy tongue: and slack and remiss in thy works. Be not as a lion in thy house, terrifying them of thy household, and oppressing them that are under thee. Let not thy hand be stretched out to receive, and shut when thou shouldst give."²³³⁴

The perfect man who attains to close union with God should exercise heroic justice in all its forms, equity included. He should perfectly observe all divine and human laws, ecclesiastical and civil. If he must make a distribution of goods or offices, he should do so in proportion to the merits of each one, rising above excessively individual considerations of relationship or friendship. He should avoid all, even the slightest, injustice or injury to anyone.

Heroic justice is especially manifest when it is very difficult to harmonize it with certain deeply rooted affections: for example, when the father of a family, who is at the same time a magistrate, must decide against his grievously guilty son, or again when a superior must send a very dear spiritual son to a distant and perilous post.

THE HEROIC DEGREE OF THE RELIGIOUS VIRTUES

The virtue of religion appears in a heroic degree when a person practices his duties in spite of sharp opposition from his family or others. It appears also in the exact observance of the vow of the most perfect, or again in the foundation of a religious family in the midst of the great difficulties which generally accompany such a work.

Heroic poverty renounces everything, and is content with what is strictly necessary in order to resemble our Lord, who had not whereon to lay His head. He who desires nothing lacks nothing; thereby, like St. Francis of Assisi, he is spiritually rich and blessed.

Heroic chastity is manifest especially in perpetual virginity, when, in the flesh, one lives an entirely spiritual life and ends by forgetting every disorder of the senses by dint of victory.

Lastly, heroic obedience is shown by perfect abnegation of selfwill, when a person does nothing, so to speak, without consulting his superiors, when he obeys all superiors whoever they may be, even though they may be only moderately kind or even ill-willed. At times obedience to very difficult orders is required, as was the case with Abraham who was asked to sacrifice his son. At such a time great faith is needed to see God Himself in the superior, who is His intermediary and who speaks in His name. It is a moment of dark night which, if well traversed, leads to a great light, for the Lord richly rewards with His graces of light, strength, and love, those who thus obey.²³³⁵ Evidently the heroic degree of the moral virtues places them more and more in the service of charity and prepares the soul for a very close union with God, which we shall discuss in

the following chapter.

The love of Jesus Crucified and of Mary in the Unitive Way

“In the world you shall have distress; but have confidence, I have overcome the world.”

John 16: 33

The quietists held that the sacred humanity of our Savior was a means useful only at the beginning of the spiritual life.²³³⁶ St. Teresa, on the contrary, insists particularly that we should not of our own initiative leave off in prayer the consideration of our Savior’s humanity, for it is the way which leads souls to His divinity.²³³⁷ In discussing the state of souls that are in the sixth mansion, the saint writes:

You may fancy that one who has enjoyed such high favors need not meditate on the mysteries of the most sacred Humanity of our Lord Jesus Christ, but will be wholly absorbed in love.... Having been warned by experience in this respect, I have decided to speak again about it here.... Be most cautious on the subject; attend to what I venture to say about it and do not believe anyone who tells you the contrary.... How much less should we willfully endeavor to abstain from thinking of our only good and remedy, the most sacred Humanity of our Lord Jesus Christ?... Our Lord Himself tells us that He is “the Way”; He also says that He is “the Light”; that no man cometh to the Father but by Him; and that “He that seeth Me, seeth the Father also.”

... True, those whom our Lord admits into the seventh mansion rarely or never need thus to help their fervor, for the reason I will tell you of, if I recollect it when I come to write of this room where, in a wonderful manner, souls are constantly in the company of Christ our Lord both in His Humanity and His Divinity.... Life is long and full of crosses and we have need to look on Christ our pattern, to see how He bore His trials, and even to take example by His Apostles and saints if we would bear our own trials perfectly. Our good Jesus and His most blessed Mother are too good company to be left.... I assure you, daughters, that I consider this a most dangerous idea whereby the devil might end by robbing us of our devotion to the most Blessed Sacrament.²³³⁸

St. Catherine of Siena, who drank several times from the sacred wound in the heart of Jesus, teaches the same doctrine in her Dialogue.²³³⁹ She speaks repeatedly of the value of our Savior’s blood.

CHRIST’S VICTORY AND ITS RADIATION

All the saints have repeated St. Paul’s words: “For to me, to live is Christ; and to die is gain... Having a desire to be dissolved and to be with Christ.”²³⁴⁰ As the profession of arms, says St. Thomas,²³⁴¹ is the life of the soldier, as study is that of the scholar, so Christ was their life, the continual object of their love and the source of their energy. St. Paul likewise delighted in saying to the Corinthians: “For both the Jews require signs, and the Greeks seek after wisdom; but we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews indeed a stumblingblock, and unto the Gentiles foolishness; but unto them that are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God.”²³⁴² “For I judged not myself to know anything among you, but Jesus Christ, and Him crucified.”²³⁴³ The great Apostle repeats this thought to the Ephesians with incomparable splendor: “That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and of revelation, in the knowledge of Him: the eyes of your heart enlightened, that you may know what the hope is of His calling, and what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints. And what is the exceeding greatness of His power toward us, who believe according to the operation of the might of His power, which He wrought in Christ, raising Him up from the dead.”²³⁴⁴ “That Christ may dwell by faith in your hearts that, being rooted and founded in charity, you may be able to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth: to know also the charity of Christ, which surpasseth all knowledge, that you may be filled unto all the fullness of God.”²³⁴⁵

All the saints have lived until the end of their lives by the contemplation of the Passion, particularly those who were more configured to Jesus crucified, like St. Francis of Assisi, St. Dominic, and more recently St. Paul of the Cross, and St. Benedict Joseph Labre.

In the unitive way are manifested increasingly the immense spiritual riches of our Savior’s holy soul, of His intellect, His will, His sensibility. More and more there appears His innate, substantial, uncreated sanctity, constituted by the very person of the Word who possesses intimately and forever His soul and body which suffered for us. One sees with increasing clearness the value of the plenitude of grace, light, and charity that sprang from the Word in the holy soul of Jesus. This plenitude was the source of the loftiest peace, of perfect beatitude even here on earth, and, at the same time, the source of the intensity of the sufferings of Christ, Priest and Victim, since these sufferings at the sight of men’s sins, which He had taken on Himself, had the same depth as His love for His offended Father and for our souls in need of redemption²³⁴⁶

In the unitive way the soul becomes increasingly conscious of the great victory won by Christ during His passion and on the cross: the victory over sin and the devil, manifested three days later by that over death.²³⁴⁷

The value of this victory over sin derived, as the soul comprehends more and more, from the act of theandric love, which

drew from the divine person of the Word an intrinsically infinite worth to satisfy for our sins and to merit eternal life for us. This act of love of our Savior's holy soul "gave more to God than was required to compensate for the offense of the whole human race."²³⁴⁸ It proceeded from the very person of the Son who is equal to the Father, and was worth more than all the merits of men and angels in their totality. Superabundant in value, it was equal and even superior to the recompense merited, that is, to the eternal life of all the elect redeemed by the sacrifice of the cross.

Truly Christ could say: "Have confidence, I have overcome the world."²³⁴⁹ During periods of calamity and persecution, what a consolation to think that Christ crucified has already won the definitive victory, and that we have only to give ourselves to Him so that He may make us benefit by it!

There are still struggles on earth, but the victory is already won by Christ, the Head of the mystical body, of which we are the members. In the unitive way, devotion to our Savior's passion becomes increasingly devotion to the glorious Christ, by His cross the Conqueror of sin and the demon. The hymns of Holy Week sing of this victory:

Vexilla Regis prodeum;
Fulget crucis mysterium,
Qua vita mortem pertulit,
Et morte vitam protulit.

Te, fons salutis, Trinitas,
Collaudet omnis spiritus:
Quibus crucis victoriam
Largiris, adde praemium. Amen.

Then the soul understands better and better what St. Thomas says, speaking of the love of God for Christ and for us: "God loves more the better things, for it has been shown that God's loving one thing more than another is nothing else than His willing for that thing greater good. God's will is the cause of goodness in things; and for this reason some things are better than others, because God wills for them greater good.... God loves Christ not only more than He loves the whole human race, but more than He loves the entire created universe. He willed for Him the greater good in giving Him 'a Name that is above all names,' in so far as He Was true God. Nor did anything of His excellence diminish when God delivered Him up to death for the salvation of the human race; rather did He become thereby a glorious conqueror [over sin, the devil, and death]. For, as Isaias (9:6) says: 'The government was placed upon His shoulder.'"²³⁵⁰

The text just quoted throws light on why God permitted the sin of the first man and its results. St. Thomas says: "God allows evils to happen in order to bring a greater good therefrom; hence it is written (Rom. 5: 20): 'Where sin abounded, grace did more abound.' Hence, too, in the blessing of the paschal candle, we say: 'O happy fault, that merited such and so great a Redeemer!'"²³⁵¹ Christ's death on the cross, which is at the same time His victory, is the most glorious manifestation of the mercy and power of God. "For God so loved the world, as to give His only begotten Son," says St. John,²³⁵² This truth appears more and more to the contemplative soul and daily shows the soul more clearly the infinite value of the Sacrifice of the Mass, which perpetuates in substance that of the cross and applies its fruits to us.

DEVOTION TO MARY IN THE UNITIVE WAY

In the unitive way, there is a profound influence, secret touches of Mary, Mediatrix of all graces, given to lead us to ever greater intimacy with our Lord. The soul that follows this way thereby enters increasingly into the mystery of the communion of saints and shares in the loftiest sentiments of the Mother of God at the foot of the cross, after the death of our Lord, on Pentecost, and still later in her prayers for the diffusion of the Gospel by the apostles, by which she obtained for them the great graces of light, love, and fortitude which they needed to carry the name of Jesus to the extremities of the then known world. Mary thus exercised the loftiest apostolate through prayer and immolation, which rendered inexpressibly fruitful the apostolate by teaching and preaching. The summits of the life of the Church, the mystical body of Jesus, are today no less under the influence of Mary Mediatrix, whose action is more universal and more radiant since her assumption into heaven.²³⁵³

That it may penetrate the mystery of Christ, that of His passion, the contemplative soul should beg Mary to introduce it more profoundly into this mystery, as the Franciscan Jacopone da Todi (1228–1306) does in the *Stabat Mater*. This hymn is only one of a number of liturgical prayers asking for this grace.

This sequence demonstrates in a singularly striking manner how much the supernatural contemplation of the mystery of Christ is in the normal way of sanctity. In precise, ardent, and splendid images, it expresses the wound in our Savior's heart and shows us how intimate and penetrating is Mary's influence to lead us to it. And not only does the Blessed Virgin lead us to this divine intimacy, but, in a sense, she establishes it in us as the admirable repetition of the word *Fac*, the expression of ardent prayer, makes clear:

Eia Mater, fons amoris,

Me sentire vim doloris
Fac ut tecum lugeam.

Fac ut ardeat cor meum,
In amando Christum Deum,
Ut sibi complaceam.

Fac ut portem Christi mortem,
Passionis fac consortem
Et plagas recolere.

Fac me plagis vulnerari,
Fac me cruce inebriari,
Et cruore Filii.

This hymn is the prayer of the soul desirous of knowing spiritually, in its turn, the wound of love and of being associated with these sorrowful mysteries through reparatory adoration, as St. John and St. Mary Magdalen were in the company of Mary on Calvary, and as St. Peter also was when he shed abundant tears.

The soul would wish always to shed these tears of contrition and adoration for, in a work attributed to St. Augustine, we read “that the more one suffers from offense offered to God, the more one rejoices in experiencing this holy sorrow.”^{[2354](#)} The *Stabat Mater* expresses these sentiments in the following beautiful strophe:

Fac me tecum pie flere,
Crucifixi condolere,
Donec ego vixero.
Juxta crucem tecum stare,
Et me tibi sociare
In planctu desidero.

We should not fail to profit by these fountains of life, but should slake our thirst at them. From the adorable wounds of our Savior gushes forth the life that we should drink abundantly. May the Lord, during the Sacrifice of the Mass and at Communion, lift us up to the fountain of His Sacred Heart! Such is the petition of a beautiful German prayer in a form accessible to all the faithful:

Ich danke Dir, Herr Jesu Christ,
Dass du für mich, gestorben bist;
Lass dein Blut und deine Fein
An mir doch nicht verloren sein.

“I thank Thee, Lord Jesus Christ, for having died for me. Let not Thy blood and Thy anguish be lost on me.”

In a more intimate and ardent manner St. Nicholas of Flue, called by the Swiss the Father of their country, expresses the same thought: “My Lord and my God, take from me everything that hinders me from going to Thee! My Lord and my God, give me everything that will lead me to Thee! My Lord and my God, take me from myself and give me completely to Thyself!”

Of a surety, this contemplation of our Savior’s infinite merits is in the normal way of sanctity; without it there can be no true love of the cross, which is nothing else than an ardent love of Jesus crucified. It is the royal road to heaven, and in it there is already something like a beginning of eternal life, *quaedam inchoatio vitae aeternae*.^{[2355](#)}

A greatly tried soul wrote as follows: “Our Savior’s divine words have often sustained me: ‘In the world you shall have distress; but have confidence, I have overcome the world.’ His final triumph, that triumph which casts so consoling a light on the things of earth, is an immense joy to me. When, worn out, I lift my eyes to our good Master, sighing: ‘Lord, I need joy,’ I see His triumph, His victory at the end of time, and this ray from on high illumines the darkest nights and restores peace to my soul in spite of all disasters. It is as if from the shore one watched the torrents passing by. Things go so badly on earth. The foundations of the universe tremble, but He is immutable, immutably good.”

Following our Lord in this way, man does not walk in darkness, but receives in ever greater abundance the light of life.^{[2356](#)}

Section III

The Forms and Degrees of the Unitive Life

It is not possible to get a right idea of the unitive life without considering its different forms and degrees. We shall, consequently, treat here of the perfect apostolic life, the fruit of contemplation, and of the life of reparation. This will prepare us to understand better what the great spiritual writers have said of arid mystical union, ecstatic union, and the transforming union. We shall thus see how to settle the question whether a soul can have the full perfection of divine love without the mystical union, either in aridity or enjoyment.

To discuss these subjects, so far beyond us, we recall what has been said of young and old professors: “Young professors teach more than they know, that is, many things they do not know. Middle-aged professors teach all that they know. Old professors teach what is useful to their hearers.” It is imperative to follow the example of the last named when one approaches the subject we are going to treat of now. To deal with it in a satisfactory manner, one should have personal experience of this eminent union. We can only repeat briefly what seems to us most essential in the testimony of the saints. We are like a spectator who, still in the valley, gazes from below at the ascent of those who are climbing to the very summit of the mountain.

Perfect Apostolic Life and Contemplation

From the fullness of contemplation proceed teaching and preaching.”
St. Thomas, IIa IIae, q. 188, a. 6.

It is inadvisable to treat of the intimate union of the purified soul with God without speaking of the fruits which result from this union in perfect apostolic life. This life differs from a purely contemplative life, that of the Carthusian, for example, and from the active life of orders devoted to hospital work, since it unites contemplation and apostolic action, which consists in the teaching of sacred doctrine, preaching, and the direction of souls.

This explains why, in the Church, orders dedicated to the apostolic life, like those of St. Dominic and St. Francis, the Carmelites, and others, unite monastic observances, such as abstinence, fasts, night rising, the profound study of philosophy and theology, integral liturgical prayer, that is, the Divine Office chanted in choir, and lastly the apostolate by oral or written teaching and preaching. If one of these elements happens to prevail to the detriment of the others, the harmony of this apostolic life is compromised. Emphasis is placed either on the letter of observances, or on a lifeless study, or on superficial preaching which cannot be fruitful. In this great diversity of functions, it is essential to preserve their balance, their unity, which constitutes the very spirit of this life; otherwise it becomes materialistic and superficial.

Blessed Henry Suso received a vision on this subject which showed him that, in an order devoted to the apostolic life, those who are almost exclusively attached to external observances are not more advanced than those who give themselves to study without the spirit of prayer, without generous love for God and souls, because neither group tends to become like Christ, neither lives by Him or can give Him to others.²³⁵⁷ “Their eyes are not yet opened,” says Blessed Henry Suso; they do not know the meaning of the interior life, nor do they understand the value of the cross, without which the apostle cannot work for the salvation of souls.

THE EMINENT SOURCE OF THE APOSTOLATE

The apostolic life should resemble as closely as possible that of our Lord and of the Apostles St. Peter, St. Paul, and St. John the Evangelist. The fathers of the Church, shepherds of their dioceses, lived this life, as also did great theologians, apostles like St. Bernard, St. Dominic, great missionaries like St. Francis Xavier. All were priests of deep thought and prayer, true contemplatives, who, to save souls, gave them their living contemplation of God and of Christ.

A striking example of preaching that “proceeds from the fullness of contemplation,” to use St. Thomas’ expression, is found in the sermons of St. Peter on Pentecost, when, enlightened and fortified by the Holy Ghost, he said to the Jews: “Jesus of Nazareth.... This same being delivered up, by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, you by the hands of wicked men have crucified and slain. Whom God hath raised up.”²³⁵⁸ “But the Author of life you killed, whom God hath raised from the dead, of which we are witnesses.... This [Jesus] is the stone which was rejected by you the builders, which is become the head of the corner. Neither is there salvation in any other.”²³⁵⁹

The preaching that proceeds from the fullness of contemplation overflows in the epistles of St. Paul: for example, in the following excerpt from the letter to the Ephesians: “I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, of whom all paternity in heaven and earth is named, that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened by His Spirit with might unto the inward man, that Christ may dwell by faith in your hearts; that, being rooted and founded in charity, you may be able to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth; to know also the charity of Christ, which surpasseth all knowledge, that you may be filled unto all the fullness of God.”²³⁶⁰

The eyes that gaze openly upon divine things are those employed in the loving and penetrating contemplation of revealed mysteries, a contemplation superior to the exterior practices of penance and also to simple study. It is the contemplation which, together with profound love of God and neighbor, should be the soul of the apostolate.

Like Jesus Christ and the Twelve, the apostle should be a contemplative who gives his contemplation to others to sanctify and save them. St. Thomas states the special end of the apostolic life in the phrase: “Contemplari et contemplata aliis tradere.”²³⁶¹

How should the relations of contemplation and action in the apostolic life be understood? That the apostolic life may preserve its unity, contemplation and action cannot be on an equal footing in it. One should be subordinated to the other, otherwise they would harm each other, and finally a choice would have to be made between them.

How should this subordination be understood? Some unconsciously diminish the traditional teaching, saying that the apostolic life has apostolic action for its primary and principal end, but that it also tends toward a certain contemplation as a means requisite for action.

Did holy apostles and great missionaries like St. Francis Xavier consider the loving contemplation of the mysteries of faith a simple means subordinated to action? Did the holy Cure of Ars thus consider prayer, meditation, the celebration of Mass? Would not such an attitude diminish the importance of union with God, the source of every apostolate? By following this point of view which is seldom explicitly formulated, one would reach the point of saying that love of neighbor is superior to love of God; this would constitute a heresy that would overthrow the very order of charity.

St. Thomas and his disciples state in a more lofty, traditional, and fruitful manner that the contemplation of divine things and the union with God which it implies cannot be conceived as a means subordinated to action, for they are superior to it. It is indisputable that there is nothing more sublime on earth than union with God through contemplation and love,²³⁶² and, consequently, there is profound value in apostolic action only so far as it proceeds from this source, which, far from being a subordinated means, is an eminent cause.

Even more, it is apostolic action itself that is a means subordinated to the union with God to which the apostle wishes to lead souls, as he himself has been led thereto. Therefore we must say that the apostolic life tends principally to contemplation which fructifies in the apostolate. As St. Thomas well says: "Preaching of the divine word should proceed from the fullness of contemplation."²³⁶³ This is the explanation given by his best commentators, among whom may be named the Carmelites of Salamanca²³⁶⁴ and the Dominican Passerini.²³⁶⁵

St. Thomas adds that Christ was not content with the purely contemplative life, but chose that which presupposes the abundance of contemplation and comes down from it to share it with men by preaching.²³⁶⁶

According to several Thomists, there is even between contemplation and action a relationship similar to that existing between the Incarnation and the redemption. The Incarnation, or the hypostatic union of the human nature of Christ with the uncreated person of the Word, is not ordered to our redemption as an inferior means to a higher end, but as an eminent cause to an inferior effect. St. Thomas says: "God loves Christ not only more than He loves the whole human race, but more than He loves the entire created universe.... Nor did anything of His excellence diminish when God delivered Him up to death for the salvation of the human race; rather did He become thereby a glorious conqueror."²³⁶⁷ In this passage, St. Thomas shows that his doctrine emanates from the contemplation of the grandeur of the mystery of Christ.

From all eternity God willed the Incarnation, not as subordinated to the redemption, but as fructifying in the redemption. Likewise, in the apostolic life, He willed contemplation and union with God, not as subordinated to action, but as fructifying in the apostolate.

Why should the apostolate proceed from the contemplation of the mysteries of salvation? Is this a necessity? It is, that the preaching of the Gospel and the direction of souls may be luminous, living, simple, and penetrating, imbued with the unction which attracts hearts and the deep conviction which draws them on. St. Thomas says in substance: He who brings the word of God to others should instruct them, draw their hearts toward God, and move their wills to the fulfillment of the divine law.²³⁶⁸

This should be the case in order that preaching may convey not only the letter, but the spirit of the word of God, of supernatural mysteries, of the precepts, and of the counsels. It is not a question here of romantic lyricism, but of the breath of divine truth which comes from a great spirit of faith and from ardent love for God and souls.

To comprehend what the preaching of the Gospel should be, we must remember that the New Law is only secondarily a written law; it is primarily and principally a law infused into souls, "the grace itself of the Holy Ghost."²³⁶⁹ That we might be made to live by this grace, we had to be instructed by the exterior and the written word on the mysteries to be believed and the precepts to be observed.

The preaching of the Gospel should be spirit and life. And that the apostle may not become discouraged in the midst of all the obstacles he encounters, he must hunger and thirst after the justice of God; he must have the gift of fortitude to persevere to the end and to lead souls on with him. Hunger and thirst for the justice of God grow in liturgical and in mental prayer. But it is chiefly the celebration of the holy Sacrifice of the Mass which, through the union with God found in it, is the summit from which the living preaching of the divine word should descend like a stream.

Normally a priest, to be "another Christ," should reach the supernatural contemplation of the sacrifice of the cross perpetuated in substance on the altar. This contemplation should be the very soul of the apostolate. Evidently it is not a means subordinated to the apostolate, but an eminent cause, similar to the always abundant springs from which great rivers flow. In a word, to bring others to God, a man must himself be closely united to Him.

THE CONDITION OF THE APOSTOLATE AND ITS FRUITFULNESS

The fruits of the apostolate should be the conversion of infidels and sinners, the advancement of the good: broadly speaking,

the salvation of souls. We should bear in mind that to save souls our Lord was not content simply to preach the truth to them; He died on the cross for love of them. Similarly, apostles cannot save souls by preaching without suffering for them.

St. Paul points this out when he writes: “In all things we suffer tribulation, but are not distressed; we are straitened, but are not destitute; we suffer persecution, but are not forsaken; we are cast down, but we perish not; always bearing about in our body the mortification of Jesus, that the life also of Jesus may be made manifest in our bodies.”²³⁷⁰ Christ announced this persecution when He promised the hundredfold to those who follow Him.²³⁷¹

The Lord recalled this truth to St. Catherine of Siena, as we see in her *Dialogue*: “Now look at the ship of thy father Dominic, My beloved son. He ordered it most perfectly, wishing that his sons should apply themselves only to My honor and the salvation of souls, with the light of science, which light he laid as his principal foundation.... At what table does he feed his sons with the light of science? At the table of the Cross, which is the table of holy desire, when souls are eaten for My honor.”²³⁷²

Among the spiritual writers of the Society of Jesus, Father Lallemant speaks in like terms in *La Doctrine spirituelle*: “As our Lord redeemed the world only by His cross...; so too, evangelical laborers apply the grace of the redemption only by their crosses and the persecutions which they suffer. Therefore great returns should not be expected from their labors unless these are accompanied by obstacles, calumnies, insults, and sufferings.

“Some think they do wonders because they preach well prepared sermons, that are delivered with charm, that are in fashion, and welcomed everywhere. They are deceived; the means on which they rely are not those which God makes use of to do great things. Crosses are needed to procure the salvation of the world. Those whom God employs to save souls, He leads by the way of crosses, as we see in the lives of apostles such as St. Francis Xavier, St. Ignatius, St. Vincent Ferrer, St. Dominic.... Jesus has chosen our crosses for us, and offers them to us as the material of the crowns He is preparing for us, and as a test of our virtue and fidelity in His service.”²³⁷³

St. Grignon de Montfort sets forth the same doctrine in his *Lettre aux amis de la croix* and in *L'Amour de la divine sagesse* (Part I, chap. 6).

The amazing fruitfulness of the apostolate of the saints is apparent especially in the missions. In Asia and the Indian Archipelago, St. Francis Xavier converted thousands of pagans; the same was true of St. Peter Claver. St. Louis Bertrand, the St. Francis Xavier of New Granada, in the midst of incessant perils, brought more than 150,000 souls to the Christian faith. In different regions, how many missionaries were cruelly martyred, their blood becoming the seed of Christians! The life of the Church, like that of her divine Founder, is a life which has passed through death and which thus always preserves its youth and an inexhaustible fecundity.

Consequently the fruitful apostolate should proceed from close union with God and the contemplation of divine things; “from the fullness of contemplation,” St. Thomas even says, though his language is always so reserved.

Our study of this question has given us an additional confirmation of the doctrine which teaches that contemplation, proceeding from living faith enlightened by the gifts, is in the normal way of sanctity, especially for the priest who must direct, enlighten, and lead souls to perfection.²³⁷⁴

The life of Reparation

To complete what we have said about union with God in the perfect, we should deal at least briefly with the life of reparation, which, through prayer and suffering, is an apostolate, willed by God to render abundantly fruitful the doctrinal apostolate by preaching.

Our Lord saved the world even more by His heroic love on the cross than by His sermons. His words gave us light, pointed out to us the way to follow; His death on the cross obtained for us the grace to follow this way.

Mary, who merited the title of Coredemptrix and that of universal Mediatrix, is the model of reparatory souls through her sufferings at the foot of the cross. By them she merited congruously for us, or by a merit of propriety based on charity, all that the Word made flesh merited for us in strict justice. His Holiness Pius X²³⁷⁵ approved this common teaching of theologians, and Pope Benedict XV ratified her title of Coredemptrix, saying that “Mary, in union with Christ, redeemed the human race.”²³⁷⁶ Thus Mary became the spiritual mother of all men.

More recently, in the encyclical *Miseremissimus Redemptor*, His Holiness Pius XI reminded the faithful of the necessity of reparation, exhorting them to unite the oblation of all their vexations and sufferings to the oblation ever living in the heart of our Lord, the principal Priest of the Sacrifice of the Mass.

In the Mass, the immolation of Jesus is no longer bloody and painful as on the cross, but the painful immolation ought to continue in the mystical body of the Savior and will continue until the end of the world. While progressively incorporating into Himself the faithful whom He vivifies, Jesus, in fact, reproduces in them something of His life as a child, of His hidden, His public, and His sorrowful life, before making them share in His glorious life in heaven. By so doing He enables them to work, to cooperate with Him, through Him, and in Him, for the salvation of souls by the same means as He used. In this sense St. Paul wrote: “Who now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up those things that are wanting of the sufferings of Christ, in my flesh, for His body, which is the Church.”²³⁷⁷ Nothing is wanting in the sufferings of Christ in themselves. They have an infinite and superabundant value by reason of the personality of the Word of God made man; but something is lacking in their radiation in us.

THE LIFE OF REPARATION IN THE PRIEST

The priest in particular should be “another Christ.” Jesus is Priest and Victim. The priest cannot wish to participate in the priesthood of Christ without sharing in some way in His state as victim, in the measure willed for him by Providence. When the priest ascends the altar, he bears on the front and back of his chasuble a cross which recalls our Savior’s.

Great bishops who, in times of persecution, gave their lives for their flocks thus understood it. A similar idea of the priesthood distinguishes priest saints, like St. Bernard, St. Dominic, St. Charles Borromeo, St. Philip Neri, and nearer our own day the Cure of Ars, who, while offering the body and precious blood of our Lord, offered all his sufferings for the faithful who came to him.

Likewise too, the friend of the Cure of Ars, Venerable Father Chevrier of Lyons, used to say in substance to the priests whom he trained: “The priest should be another Christ. Thinking of the crib, he should be humble and poor; the more he is so, the more he glorifies God and is useful to his neighbor. The priest should be a man who is stripped. Recalling Calvary, he should think of immolating himself in order to give life. The priest should be a crucified man. Meditating on the tabernacle, he should remember that he ought to give himself incessantly to others; he should become like good bread for souls. The priest should be a man who is consumed.”²³⁷⁸

Father Charles de Foucauld, who offered his life in order to seal with his blood his apostolate among the Moslems, wrote in a notebook, which he always carried on his person: “Live as if you were to die a martyr today. The more everything is lacking to us on earth, the more we find the best thing that earth can give us: the cross.”²³⁷⁹

This attitude of soul is patent in the lives of many founders of religious orders, who, following the example of our Lord, had to complete their work by perfect self-immolation. This is especially manifest, and most strikingly so, in the life of St. Paul of the Cross, who founded the Passionists in the eighteenth century.²³⁸⁰ His life is one of the greatest examples of the life of reparation in a founder. By forty-five years of sufferings which were like a continual prayer in the Garden of Olives, he confirmed his work. St. Paul died in 1775 at the age of eighty-one; the last months of his life were like an anticipated heaven.

The profound pages in the book just mentioned, in our opinion throw light on the lives of several other saints, in particular on

the last years of St. Alphonsus Liguori when he was so severely tried. A superficial reading of the interior sufferings described in his Life, written by Father Berthe, might lead one to believe that they were those of the passive purification of the senses united to those of the spirit. In reality, the soul of this great saint, then eighty years of age, was already purified, and these great trials at the end were chiefly reparatory for the sanctification of sinners. It is the great apostolate through suffering that makes the saints share in the sorrowful life of our Lord and that allows them to seal their work as He sealed His on the cross.

THE LIFE OF REPARATION IN ALL THOSE WHO HAVE A HEAVY CROSS TO CARRY

If the priest ought to be another Christ, the simple Christian should also “take up his cross daily”²³⁸¹ and offer his sufferings in union with the sacrifice of Jesus perpetuated on the altar. He ought to offer them for himself and for the souls for whose salvation he should work.

St. Benedict Joseph Labre was not a priest. He did not share, in the real sense of the word, in the priesthood of Christ, but he shared largely in His state as a victim. As much must be said of many spouses of Christ, who, following Mary’s example, share in His sufferings and find therein a profound spiritual motherhood, which is like a reflection of the spiritual maternity of the Blessed Virgin in relation to souls redeemed by the blood of her Son.

Mary did not receive the priestly character; she could not consecrate the Holy Eucharist, but as Father Olier says, “she received the plenitude of the spirit of the priesthood,” which is the spirit of Christ the Redeemer. She penetrated the mystery of our altars far more than did the Apostle St. John, when he celebrated Mass in her presence and gave her Holy Communion. In the early Church, Mary, by her interior oblation united to that of the Mass, rendered the apostolate of the Twelve fruitful. By her interior suffering at the sight of the nascent heresies that denied the divinity of her Son, she was the spiritual mother of souls to a degree unimaginable without profound experience of this hidden apostolate. She thus continued the sacrifice of her Son.

A servant of God who lived by this truth for a long time said to us: “The mystical body of Christ can no more live without suffering than our eyes without the light of the sun. On earth, the nearer a soul is to God, that is, the more it loves, the more it is dedicated to suffering. For souls that have received everything from the Church, is it not a noble vocation to live and immolate themselves for their Mother?”²³⁸² The same valiant religious said also: “Patience is necessary, but I shall win her. Our Lord will win her.... I always say to Him: I want that soul at the cost of no matter what suffering.”²³⁸³ “Until the end of the world, Christ will agonize in His members, and it is by these sufferings and this agony that the Church, His spouse, will bring forth saints.... Since the death of Jesus, the law has not changed: souls are saved only by suffering and dying for them.”²³⁸⁴ “The eternally glorified heart of Jesus will suffer no more, it can no longer suffer; henceforth it is our turn.... What happiness that it is our turn and no longer His to suffer now!”²³⁸⁵

The Lord causes these reparatory souls to hear words such as these: “Have you not asked Me for a share in My passion? Choose: do you wish the joy of unclouded faith, ravishing you and flooding your soul with delights, or do you wish darkness, suffering, which will make you cooperate in the salvation of souls?”²³⁸⁶ Our Lord invites such souls to choose quite freely; but, as if powerless to resist, they abandon joy and choose suffering with all its darkness, so that light, sanctity, and salvation may be given to others.

From time to time, God allows them to see the hardness of hearts, and at certain times hell seems unchained to tear from them an act of despair. They fight for hours; it is a struggle of spirit against spirit; at no matter what cost, they must follow the Master to the end. He lets them understand with increasing clearness that He expects from them love of scorn and complete destruction, like that of the grain of wheat cast into the earth, which must die that it may bring forth much fruit. This life of reparation is that of souls called to the intimate service of the Lord Jesus.²³⁸⁷

Such is the sign of perfect love, as it is described in *The Dialogue* of St. Catherine of Siena: “This is seen by the same sign that was given to the holy disciples after they had received the Holy Spirit,... not fearing pain, but rather glorying therein... Through this charity, which is of the Holy Spirit, the soul participates in His will, fortifying her own.”²³⁸⁸ In the same book, we read (it is the Lord who speaks):

These, I say, as if enamored of My honor, and famished for the food of souls, run to the table of the most holy cross, willing to suffer pain and endure much for the service of the neighbor, and desiring to preserve and acquire the virtues, bearing in their body the stigmata of Christ crucified, causing the crucified love which is theirs to shine, being visible through self-contempt and delighted endurance of the shames and vexations on every side.... Such as these follow the Immaculate Lamb, My only-begotten Son, who was both blessed and sorrowful on the cross.... These souls, thrown into the furnace of My charity, no part of their will remaining outside, but the whole of them being inflamed in Me, are like a brand wholly consumed in the furnace, so that no one can take hold of it to extinguish it, because it has become fire.

In the same way, no one can seize these souls or draw them outside of Me.”²³⁸⁹

This is perfect configuration to Jesus Christ; it is, in the life of reparation, the transforming union which has become fruitful and radiating. It is the participation in the state of Jesus as victim and, even in saints who have not received the priesthood properly so called, it is a very close union with the eternal Priest, in which are admirably realized St. Peter’s words: “Unto whom coming, as to a living stone, rejected indeed by men, but chosen and made honorable by God, be you also as living stones built

up, a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ.”²³⁹⁰

This configuration to Christ crucified by the life of reparation is like the immediate prelude of eternal life.

A GREAT EXAMPLE THE REPARATORY NIGHT OF THE SPIRIT IN ST. PAUL OF THE CROSS²³⁹¹

The reading of the works of St. John of the Cross leads one to consider the night of the spirit chiefly as a personal passive purification, which prepares the soul for the perfect union with God, called the transforming union. This purification, which in its passive aspect is a mystical state and implies infused contemplation, appears thus as necessary to remove the defects of proficients of whom the author speaks in *The Dark Night*.²³⁹² This is particularly true of a secret spiritual pride, which is sometimes the cause of many illusions. The night of the spirit is a purgatory before death, but a purgatory in which the soul merits and grows greatly in love. Finally, this darkness and the affliction experienced in this state give way to the superior light and joy of the transforming union, the immediate prelude of the life of heaven. The winter of the night of the spirit seems followed by a springtime and a perpetual summer, after which there would no longer be an autumn.

Such is the impression created by the reading of *The Dark Night* and *The Living Flame of Love*. It may be said that for advanced souls the night of the spirit is only a tunnel to be traversed before entering the transforming union, and that afterward the soul need not pass through it again.

The lives of some great servants of God especially dedicated to reparation, to immolation for the salvation of souls or to the apostolate by interior suffering, make one think, however, of a prolongation of the night of the spirit even after their entrance into the transforming union. In such cases, this trial would no longer be chiefly purificatory; it would be above all reparative.

Though St. John of the Cross does not insist particularly on this point, he alludes several times to the interior trials endured by the saints for the salvation of sinners.²³⁹³ St. Teresa also mentions them when she writes of the great generosity of souls that have entered the seventh mansion.²³⁹⁴

What should be our attitude toward a night of the spirit that is more reparatory than purificatory and is even prolonged over lengthy period after the entrance into the transforming union, when the tried soul is already personally purified? We treated this question briefly in another work;²³⁹⁵ here it is expedient to recall in regard to this point the incontrovertible principles and some significant facts.

First of all, the Christian mind cannot forget that the great interior sufferings which our Lord and His holy Mother experienced at the sight of sin and in the offering of themselves as victims for us were not for their purification but for our redemption, and that the more souls advance in the spiritual life, the more their interior sufferings resemble those of Jesus and Mary. The common opinion is that the servants of God are more particularly tried, whether it be that they need a more profound purification, or whether, following the example of our Lord, they must work by the same means as He used for a great spiritual cause, such as the foundation of a religious order or the salvation of many other souls. St. John of the Cross and St. Teresa almost continually experienced this, as the facts clearly show.

We shall point out here a particularly striking fact in this connection, and we shall then briefly compare the purifying night of the spirit with that which is chiefly reparatory and which contains an apostolate through suffering that is as fruitful as hidden.

Let us note first of all, though without insistence, a fairly characteristic fact, verified toward the close of the life of St. Alphonsus Liguori. A superficial reading of this period of his life, he was then eighty, might give the impression that he was experiencing the passive night of the senses, which is frequently accompanied by strong temptations against chastity and patience, virtues having their seat in the sensible part of the soul. The holy old man had at this time such violent temptations that his servant wondered if they would not cause him to lose his mind. But consideration of all the work already accomplished by grace in the soul of this great saint leads to the conclusion that this trial in his last years was not precisely for him the passive purification of the senses (although it had all the appearances of being so), but a series of afflictions that he endured chiefly for his neighbor and for the consolidation of his Order for which he had already suffered so much.

There is an even more striking example in the life of St. Paul of the Cross, the founder of the Passionists. We may form an exact idea of his interior life from his numerous letters,²³⁹⁶ from the notes left by his confessor and director, Father John Mary, and from other documents of the period, quoted in the process of canonization and the preparatory work. Father Cajetan of the Holy Name of Mary, CP., assembled the most important of these documents in his book, *Oraison et ascension mystique de saint Paul de la Croix*.²³⁹⁷ Father Cajetan kindly gave us some other documents which he plans to publish soon and which confirm the contents of those already published.

We shall cite here only the most significant facts in the long and austere life of the saint, which was wholly dedicated to the service of God. Born in 1694, St. Paul of the Cross, who lived to be eighty-one, became the founder of a religious order vowed to reparation.

Brought up in a thoroughly Christian manner and accustomed from his youth to complete abnegation and the practice of all the virtues, St. Paul very early in life had the affective prayer of simple gaze, and at about the age of nineteen a notable

increase in piety. He called this period “his conversion”; in it appear the signs of the passive purification of the senses, accompanied, as is not unusual, by an attack of scruples.²³⁹⁸

From this time on, Father Cajetan rightly distinguishes three periods in his mystical life. In the first, which lasted twelve years, the saint was raised progressively to the different degrees of prayer described by St. Teresa, even to the transforming union. In the second period, which lasted forty-five years, he had exceptionally profound experience of the life of reparation. In the third period, which comprised the last five years of his life, although his trials continued, consolations increased in proportion as he drew near the end of his journey.

In the first period, after the passive purification of the senses and the painful attack of scruples, the servant of God, who had received the grace of infused contemplation, remained for three or four hours at a time in prayer.²³⁹⁹ He gave seven hours daily to mental prayer. According to the testimony of his confessor, Father John Mary, he had experience of ecstatic prayer at about the age of twenty-four, being often rapt out of his senses. He then received great lights on the mysteries of faith and was favored with visions which gave him to understand that he should found an order Consecrated to the Passion.²⁴⁰⁰ At this period he also received a vision of the Blessed Trinity, one of heaven, and another of hell; his faith “seemed to him changed into evidence.”²⁴⁰¹

It seems certain that St. Paul of the Cross personally underwent the passive purification of the spirit at the age of twenty-six, chiefly during a retreat of forty days in 1720. Father Cajetan relates these trials at length.²⁴⁰² At this time the saint heard words uttered against God, “diabolical words, which, he said, pierced his heart and soul”²⁴⁰³

This passive purification of the spirit was completed by a contemplation of our Savior’s passion,²⁴⁰⁴ a contemplation which led the saint “through love to make the most holy sufferings of Jesus his own.” “The soul,” he says, “all immersed in pure love, without an image, in most pure and naked faith, suddenly finds itself, when it so pleases the Sovereign Good, plunged equally into the ocean of the Savior’s sufferings” and sees “that the Passion is wholly a work of love.”²⁴⁰⁵

From this time on, the saint’s prayer consisted in putting on the sufferings of Jesus and in allowing himself to be immersed in our Savior’s divinity.²⁴⁰⁶ Before the age of thirty-one, St. Paul of the Cross received the grace of the transforming union. This fact can scarcely be doubted if, after carefully considering the loftiness of the purifying graces which preceded it, one takes cognizance of the testimony gathered by Father Cajetan.²⁴⁰⁷ This signal grace was even accompanied by the symbolism which sometimes manifests it sensibly: by the apparition of our Lord, of His Blessed Mother, and of several saints. St. Paul of the Cross also received a gold ring on which were represented the instruments of the Passion.

When we see to what close union with Jesus crucified the servant of God attained before the age of thirty-one, and consider that he was to live to the age of eighty-one and found an order vowed to reparation, we are less astonished at seeing him associated afterward for a period of forty-five years with the sorrowful life of our Lord Jesus Christ. In fact, after receiving the grace of the transforming union, he had, according to the testimony of his confessor,²⁴⁰⁸ to pass through forty-five years of interior desolations, most painful abandonment, during which, “from time to time only, the Lord granted him a short respite.”²⁴⁰⁹

His life was truly a life of reparation in all its depth and elevation; it was the apostolate by spiritual suffering to an exceptional degree. This suffering consisted not only in the subtraction of sensible consolations, but, as it were, in the eclipse of the virtues of faith, hope, and charity. The saint believed himself abandoned by God, he believed that God was irritated with him. His temptations to despair and sadness were overwhelming; and yet in this interminable trial, St. Paul showed great patience, perfect resignation to the divine will, and extreme kindness to all who approached him, as Father Cajetan relates.²⁴¹⁰ In the *Summary* of the ordinary processes in view of his canonization, are the following declarations: “One day St. Paul said to his director: ‘If anyone should ask me at any time what I was thinking about, it seems to me that I could reply that I was thinking of God.’”²⁴¹¹ This was likewise the case even in his greatest spiritual desolations, at a time when it seemed to him that he no longer had faith, hope, or charity.²⁴¹² He was accustomed to say: “It seems to me impossible not to think of God, since our spirit is wholly filled with God and we are entirely in Him.”²⁴¹³

Actually, when St. Paul of the Cross went through the streets of Rome exclaiming: “A via Pauli, libera nos, Domine,” he was unable to breathe spiritually except in God. Day and night for forty-five years his prayer was a painful, heroic, incessant prayer, which sought God ardently, and which sought Him to give Him to the souls for whom this great saint suffered. More fruitful than years of preaching inspired by a lesser love, these painful years were a sublime realization of the Master’s words: “We ought always to pray, and not to faint.”²⁴¹⁴ The saint’s life and trials throw light on the import of the following thought of St. John of the Cross: “A single act of pure love can do more good in the Church than many exterior works” inspired by a lesser charity.

Near the close of these forty-five years of suffering, St. Paul of the Cross experienced intervals of consolation. He felt himself drawn into our Savior’s wounds, and Jesus crucified said to him: “You are in My heart.”²⁴¹⁵ The Blessed Virgin appeared to him, and also the soul of a priest condemned to purgatory, for whom he was to suffer. Our Savior’s passion was,

so to speak, imprinted on his heart.²⁴¹⁶

After forty-five years, his trial was mitigated, and spiritual consolations increased progressively during the last five years of his long life. He had an apparition of our Lady of Sorrows and other favors in the sacristy of the church of SS. John and Paul in Rome, ecstasies with and without levitation. The last months of his life, at the age of eighty-one, were like the immediate prelude of the beatitude of heaven.

The facts we have just recounted are certainly most exceptional. From time to time, however, we find, more particularly in contemplative orders vowed to prayer and immolation, somewhat similar facts in souls that have a reparatory vocation and have made a vow consecrating themselves to this apostolate through suffering. We have known three very generous Carmelites and a priest, all of whom seemed to be in an interminable night of the spirit (thirty and forty years); yet these souls were apparently already purified, but their oblation for the salvation of sinners seemed to have been accepted.

After the examination of these facts, in the light of principles we believe that we can reach the following conclusion: When the night of the spirit is chiefly purificatory, under the influence of the grace that is exercised mainly by the gift of understanding, the theological virtues and humility are purified of all human alloy. As we have shown elsewhere,²⁴¹⁷ the formal motive of these virtues is freed from every accessory motive, and their primary object brought into powerful relief above every secondary object. The soul thus purified can pass beyond the formulas of mysteries and enter into “the deep things of God,” as St. Paul says.²⁴¹⁸ Then, in spite of all temptations against faith and hope, the soul firmly believes by a direct act in a most pure and sublime manner which surmounts temptation; it believes for the sole and most pure motive supernaturally attained: the authority of God revealing. It also hopes for the sole reason that He is ever helpful, infinite Mercy. It loves Him in the most complete aridity, because He is infinitely better in Himself than all the gifts which He could grant us. The first revealing Truth, formal motive of infused faith, the divine, helpful Mercy, formal motive of hope, the infinite Goodness of God sovereignly lovable in itself, then appear more and more in their transcendent supernaturalness like three stars of first magnitude in the night of the spirit.²⁴¹⁹

When this trial is chiefly reparatory, when it has principally for its end to make the already purified soul work for the salvation of its neighbor, then it preserves the same lofty characteristics just described, but takes on an additional character more reminiscent of the intimate sufferings of Jesus and Mary, who did not need to be purified. In this case the suffering makes one think of that of a lifesaver who, in a storm, struggles heroically to save from death those who are on the point of drowning. Spiritual life-savers, like St. Paul of the Cross, struggle not only for hours and months, but sometimes for years in order to snatch souls from eternal death; and, in a way, these reparative souls must resist the temptations of the souls they seek to save that they may come efficaciously to their assistance. Reparative souls are intimately associated with our Savior’s sorrowful life; in them St. Paul’s words²⁴²⁰ are fully realized: “Heirs indeed of God, and joint heirs with Christ; yet so, if we suffer with Him, that we may be also glorified with Him.”

The Influence of the Holy Ghost in the Perfect Soul

“If thou didst know the gift of God!”

John 4: 10

For a clear understanding of the nature of the mystical union, we must treat of the influence of the Holy Ghost in the perfect soul by recalling the most indisputable and lofty principles commonly taught on this subject. To see their meaning and import, we shall consider first the Holy Ghost as the supreme gift, and secondly what follows this gift in the perfect soul.

THE HOLY GHOST, UNCREATED GIFT

The Holy Ghost is called the Gift par excellence. Christ alluded and more than alluded to this title when He said to the Samaritan woman: “If thou didst know the gift of God!” The created gift of sanctifying grace, united to charity, in itself immensely surpasses all natural gifts, those of the richest imagination, of the keenest intellect, of the most energetic will. Grace, the seed of eternal life, even immensely exceeds the natural life of the angels, the natural strength of their intellect and will; it also exceeds, and that greatly, as St. Paul says, graces that are gratis datae and, so to speak, extrinsic, like the gift of miracles, the gift of tongues, and prophecy.

The Holy Ghost is the uncreated Gift, infinitely superior to that of sanctifying grace and of charity, superior to every degree of charity and every degree of glory.

He is, first of all, the uncreated Gift, as the final and eternal term of the divine fecundity of the heavenly Father and of His Son. By the eternal generation of the Word, the infinitely good Father communicates to the Son all the divine nature, gives Him to be God of God, light of light. The Father and the Son breathe forth the personal Love that is the Holy Ghost.²⁴²¹ The third divine Person thus proceeds from the mutual love of the Father and the Son; He is the uncreated Gift which the first two Persons give each other, the unique gift, by an eternal spiration that communicates all the divine nature to the Holy Ghost.

St. Thomas explains²⁴²² why the Holy Ghost is called the personal and uncreated Gift. He says that every gift proceeds from a gratuitous donation whose source is love, and the first thing we give to someone is the love by which we wish him well. Thus love is the first of all gifts, the principle of all the others. Consequently the Holy Ghost, who is personal subsistent Love, deserves to be called the personal and uncreated Gift.

This supreme Gift, which the first two divine Persons make each other from all eternity, has been given to us in time by our Lord Jesus Christ. He had already given us the Eucharist at the Last Supper, and His precious blood on the cross; He had given us grace by all the sacraments. Lastly, He willed to give us the supreme Gift, the uncreated Gift, to crown all His benefactions. He had promised to send us the Holy Ghost and, in fact, He sent Him to us on Pentecost.

The grandeur of this supreme gift appears more clearly in comparison with the others, even with the most sublime among them. Our Savior had already merited for us all the effects of our predestination: our vocation to Christian life, our justification or conversion, final perseverance, and the glory of the elect redeemed by His blood; but He willed to give us still more, to bestow on us the uncreated Gift, the Holy Ghost.

When the apostles received the Holy Ghost, they were enlightened, strengthened, confirmed in grace, and transformed; and, under the direction of the Holy Ghost, they persevered even to martyrdom.

This discussion shows why the names proper to the Holy Ghost are personal Love and the uncreated Gift. By appropriation, He is also called the Comforter. He is, indeed, the great spiritual friend who comforts us in the sorrows of life, in anxiety which sometimes grows into anguish. Thus He comforted the apostles, deprived of our Lord’s sensible presence, when the great difficulties of their apostolate were beginning. For each of us Pentecost was renewed when we received confirmation.

THE ACTIVITY OF THE UNCREATED GIFT IN OUR SOULS

We have truly received the supreme Gift. Through charity and the gift of wisdom, from which proceeds a quasi-experimental knowledge of the presence in our souls of the divine Persons, who always remain united, we can enjoy this Gift.

At this point in our study, we consider it advisable to insist on the principal effects attributed to the Holy Ghost by appropriation, although the Father and the Son also concur in their production, as They do in every effect of the divine power that is common to the three Persons.²⁴²³

The uncreated Gift first of all strengthens, preserves, and increases the created gift of sanctifying grace in our souls.

Therefore, says St. Thomas,²⁴²⁴ our Lord, speaking to the Samaritan woman, calls grace “a fountain of water, springing up into life everlasting.” In contrast to dead water preserved in cisterns or ditches, living water is not separated from its gushing source and, under the impulsion of its source, always flows toward the ocean.

Thus sanctifying grace is not separated from the source of living water, the Holy Ghost; it is He Himself who preserves it in us and gives it that strength of impulsion which drives it in a way toward the spiritual ocean that is eternal life. In this sense St. Paul says: “The charity of God is poured forth in our hearts by the Holy Ghost, who is given to us.”²⁴²⁵

Hence the Holy Ghost sometimes gives the perfect soul a confident certitude of being in the state of grace, according to the words of St. Paul: “The Spirit Himself giveth testimony to our spirit, that we are the sons of God.”²⁴²⁶ He gives us this testimony, says St. Thomas,²⁴²⁷ by the filial affection which He excites in us, and by which, in a way, He makes Himself felt by us as the life of our life.

However, this sort of transitory certitude is far from having the clarity of evidence, for we cannot perfectly discern the filial affection inspired by the Holy Ghost from a natural act of love of God, from an inefficacious love, accompanied at times by a certain lyricism, which may exist without grace, as happens in some poets.

The Holy Ghost “dwells in light inaccessible” which seems obscure to us because it is too strong for us, but His inspiration reassures us, according to the words of the Apocalypse: “To him that overcometh, I will give the hidden manna,... and a new name written, which no man knoweth, but he that receiveth it.”²⁴²⁸

For the same reason the Holy Ghost strengthens our faith and makes it penetrating and sweet. St. Paul says: “The Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God.... Now we have received... the Spirit that is of God, that we may know the things that are given us from God.”²⁴²⁹

In consequence also, the Holy Ghost strengthens the certitude of our hope, a certitude which is not yet that of salvation, but that of tending toward salvation;²⁴³⁰ a certitude that increases in the measure in which we draw near to the end of the journey.

Lastly and above all, the Holy Ghost, personal Love, excites in perfect souls an infused love of God and of neighbor notably different from the other acts of charity. It is a love to which the soul could not move itself with the help of common actual grace; it requires a special inspiration, a superior operating grace. There is in it a visit of the Lord; it is then the Holy Ghost Himself who moves us to love Him. He causes this infused love, of which He is at one and the same time the beginning and the end, to well up from our hearts. We shall never be able to love God as much as He loves us by His uncreated and eternal dilection; but between Him and us there is a certain equality of love when it is the Holy Ghost Himself who gives rise in us to the infused love which He purifies and strengthens until our entrance into heaven.

It is of this infused love that the author of *The Imitation* speaks, when he says:

O Lord God, my holy Lover, when Thou shalt come into my heart, all that is within me shall be filled with joy. Thou art my glory and the exultation of my heart. Thou art my hope and my refuge in the day of my tribulation. But because I am as yet weak in love and imperfect in virtue, therefore do I stand in need of being strengthened and comforted by Thee. Wherefore do Thou visit me often, and instruct me in Thy holy discipline... so that I may become... courageous to suffer, and steadfast to persevere. A great thing is love [excited by Thee], a great good above all goods. It alone lighteneth all that is burdensome, and beareth equally all that is unequal, for it carrieth a burden without being burdened, and maketh all else that is bitter sweet and savory. The noble love of Jesus impelleth us to do great things, and exciteh us always to desire that which is the more perfect.... Love often knoweth no measure, but groweth fervent above all measure.... Love watcheth, and sleeping slumbereth not. When weary, it is not tired; when straitened, it is not constrained; when frightened, it is not disturbed; but like a vivid flame and a burning torch, it mounteth upward and securely passeth through all.²⁴³¹

This teaching, which is confirmed by the experience of the saints, rests on revelation itself. St. Paul tells us: “The Spirit also helpeth our infirmity, for we know not what we should pray for as we ought; but the Spirit Himself asketh for us with unspeakable groanings.... He asketh for the saints according to God”;²⁴³² “according to God,” that is, according to the divine good pleasure, which He knows perfectly.

In *The Dialogue* of St. Catherine of Siena, the Lord Himself explains these words, saying: “In perfect souls the Holy Ghost weeps tears of fire,”²⁴³³ in particular at the sight of the sins that lead souls to perdition. These spiritual tears often obtain the remission of great sins.

For the same reason the Holy Ghost is called the Father of the poor, of those especially who love holy poverty. He nourishes them spiritually like a mother by His divine charity; from time to time He gives them a holy joy and, as it were, a foretaste of eternal life.²⁴³⁴

He inspires them with the love of the cross, that is, the love of Jesus crucified, of His sufferings, of His holy humiliations. He gives them the desire to share therein in the measure willed for them by Providence, and He makes them find peace, strength, and occasionally joy in this desire. The Holy Ghost configures His faithful servants to Christ crucified, and through them, through their sufferings, He saves souls.

He shows faithful souls the value of His divine inspirations which, when not resisted, lead to true sanctity. As a result, these souls have an increasingly deeper understanding of the effect which the consecration of the soul to the Holy Ghost may produce when well made.

Lastly, He sometimes gives most perfect souls as it were a certitude of their predestination and salvation by a special revelation or by the equivalent of such a revelation, by granting them, together with a savor of eternal life, the experimental knowledge of sanctifying grace as the seed of glory.

CONCLUSION

All theologians accept these principles which are manifestly based on revelation.²⁴³⁵ They lift us gently toward what the great spiritual writers have said about the mystical union, arid or consoled, occasionally ecstatic, the full development of which is called the transforming union. Taking especially St. Teresa and St. John of the Cross as our guides, we shall discuss this mystical union, properly so called. What these two saints say about this union seems less exceptional after a study of the higher laws of the development of sanctifying grace, of charity, and of the gifts of the Holy Ghost. One sees in them an excellent fruit which forms mysteriously but normally in the flower of charity under the ever more intimate influence of the interior Master, of the Comforter, who instructs by His unction, without noise of words, and who draws the soul always more strongly to Himself.

The mystical union is, in our opinion, the normal though eminent fruit of the indwelling of the Blessed Trinity in our souls. The three divine Persons dwell in the soul in the state of grace as in a temple where they can be and sometimes are the object of a quasi-experimental knowledge and of an infused love. They thus make Themselves felt as the life of our life. When this quasi-experimental knowledge of the divine Persons present in us and this infused love have reached their full, normal development, they constitute the mystical union, properly so called.

The indwelling of the Blessed Trinity in our souls is thus the center from which our spiritual life springs and to which it returns. It is the realization of St. John's words: "God is charity; and he that abideth in charity, abideth in God, and God in him."²⁴³⁶

The truth of this doctrine is still more evident when we consider not a given individual soul, but the human soul itself and especially divine grace itself. The grace of the virtues and the gifts is not only the seed of the mystical union; it is normally the seed of the beatific vision and of its immediate prelude: *gratia est semen gloriae*, a doctrine profoundly understood by Sister Elizabeth of the Trinity, a valiant Carmelite of Dijon. The mystery of the indwelling of the Blessed Trinity in the center of her soul was the great reality of her interior life.²⁴³⁷

Arid Mystical Union and Ecstatic Union According to St. Teresa

When we spoke²⁴³⁸ of the degrees of contemplative prayer in proficients, taking St. Teresa²⁴³⁹ as our guide, we described arid quiet, next sweet quiet, in which the will alone is captivated by God, and lastly the prayer of simple union, in which not only the will is seized by God, but also the understanding and the memory, and in which the imagination is as if asleep, because all the activity of the soul takes place in its higher part. There is even at times a beginning of ecstasy or an initial suspension of the exercise of the exterior senses. Following what St. Teresa wrote in the sixth mansion, we shall now discuss arid and painful union, which corresponds to the night of the spirit, then ecstatic union or the spiritual betrothal, and lastly, in the following chapter, the transforming union or spiritual marriage.

ARID AND PAINFUL MYSTICAL UNION

St. Teresa speaks of this union at the beginning of the sixth mansion,²⁴⁴⁰ but she describes especially its concomitant outward phenomena. St. John of the Cross, on the other hand, shows more the intimate nature of this state under the name of the night of the spirit, or the passive purification of the spirit, as we saw at the beginning of the fourth part of this work.

God makes the soul desire the immense good which He is preparing for it; and He causes it to pass through a terrible crucible, of which St. Teresa writes:

An outcry is raised against such a person by those amongst whom she lives.... They say she wants to pass for a saint, that she goes to extremes in piety.... Persons she thought were her friends desert her making the most bitter remarks of all.... They make a thousand scoffing remarks.... The worst of it is, these troubles do not blow over but last all her life.... ‘

Yet, oh! the rest would seem trifling in comparison could I relate the interior torments met with here, but they are impossible to describe. Let us first speak of the trial of meeting with so timorous and inexperienced a confessor that nothing seems safe to him.... The poor soul beset by the same fears, seeks its confessor as judge, and feels a torture and dismay at his condemnation that can only be realized by those who have experienced it themselves. For one of the severe trials of these souls, especially if they have lived wicked lives, is their belief that God permits them to be deceived in punishment for their sins. While actually receiving these graces they feel secure and cannot but suppose that these favors proceed from the Spirit of God; but this state lasts a very short time, while the remembrance of their misdeeds is ever before them, so that when, as is sure to happen, they discover any faults in themselves, these torturing thoughts return.

The soul is quieted for a time when the confessor reassures it, although it returns later on to its former apprehensions, but when he augments its fears they become almost unbearable. Especially is this the case when such spiritual dryness ensues that the mind feels as if it never had thought of God nor ever will be able to do so. When men speak of Him, they seem to be talking of some person heard of long ago....

Her understanding being too obscure to discern the truth, she believes all that the imagination, which now has the upper hand, puts before her mind, besides crediting the falsehoods suggested to her by the devil, whom doubtless our Lord gives leave to tempt her. The evil spirit even tries to make her think God has rejected her.... No comfort can be found in this tempest of trouble....

There is no other remedy in such a tempest except to wait for the mercy of God who, unexpectedly, by some casual word or unforeseen circumstance, suddenly dispels all these sorrows. Then every cloud of trouble disappears and the mind is left full of light and far happier than before. It praises our Lord God like one who has come out victorious from a dangerous battle, for it was He who won the victory. The soul is fully conscious that the conquest was not its own.... Thus it realizes its weakness and how little man can help himself if God forsake him. This truth now needs no demonstration.²⁴⁴¹

The soul then understands far better the Master’s words: “Without Me you can do nothing” in the order of salvation, and it is led more and more to admit, with St. Augustine and St. Thomas, that grace is efficacious of itself, that it excites our effort instead of being rendered efficacious by it.

What conduct should be observed in this trial? St. Teresa tells us in the same chapter:

Their comfort must come from above—nothing earthly can help them. This great God wishes us to acknowledge His sovereignty and our own misery.... The best remedy for these crosses... is to perform external works of charity and to trust in the mercy of God, which never fails those who hope in Him....

The devils also bring about exterior trials which, being more unusual, need not be mentioned. They are far less painful, for whatever the demons may do, I believe they never succeed in paralyzing the faculties or disturbing the soul in the former manner. In fact, the reason is able to discern that the evil spirits can do no more harm than God permits; and while the mind has not lost its powers, all sufferings are comparatively insignificant.²⁴⁴²

Farther on,²⁴⁴³ St. Teresa speaks of a still more painful purification of love, which occurs at the entrance to the seventh mansion, “as the purification of purgatory introduces the soul into heaven.” But the soul is conscious, while enduring this suffering, that it is an eminent favor.

After the interior sufferings described at the beginning of the sixth mansion, in which there is a painful presence of God, the

soul receives such knowledge of the divine majesty that frequently partial or complete ecstasy follows.

ECSTATIC UNION; ITS MANIFESTATION AND NATURE

Ecstasy is the suspension of the exterior senses; it does not necessarily imply levitation, or the elevation of the body above the ground. This suspension of the exterior senses is manifested by more or less marked insensibility, the slowing of the respiration, the diminution of vital heat. According to St. Teresa: "One perceives that the natural heat of the body is perceptibly lessened; the coldness increases, though accompanied with exceeding joy and sweetness."²⁴⁴⁴ The body then becomes motionless, the gaze fixed on an invisible object; sometimes the eyelids close.

Instead of weakening the body, this state gives it new strength.²⁴⁴⁵ A person who ordinarily would find difficulty in kneeling for a long time, does so without difficulty in the state of ecstasy. Occasionally the suspension of the senses is incomplete and allows the ecstatic to dictate the revelations received, as happened to St. Catherine of Siena.²⁴⁴⁶

Whence arises the loss of the use of the exterior senses in this state? It proceeds from the soul's absorption in God, which is itself the result of a very special grace of light and love.²⁴⁴⁷ The abundant light then given, for example, on the mysteries of the redemptive Incarnation, of the Eucharist as the expression of the immense goodness of God, produces lively admiration and great love of God. The will is touched and, as it were, wounded by the divine attraction, and moves toward God with great impetuosity, like a magnetized needle toward a pole. The admiration of the intellect grows through love, and love through admiration; as St. Francis de Sales says: "The sight of beauty makes us love it, and love makes us look at it."

The soul, thus ravished with admiration and love for God, loses the use of its senses because all its activity passes over into its higher part. St. Thomas noted this principle clearly: "When the soul tends wholly to the act of one power, man is abstracted from the act of another power";²⁴⁴⁸ when the soul is wholly moved to the act of one of its faculties, the exercise of the other faculties is suspended. If at times a scholar, like Archimedes, is so absorbed by speculation that he no longer hears speech addressed to him, with what far greater reason is this true of the contemplative soul at the time when a very strong grace makes it perceive the infinite majesty of God and absorbs it in this blessed contemplation! Then ecstasy, which follows this eminent infused contemplation, is not, properly speaking, extraordinary; it may be the normal result of the soul's absorption in God, according to the principle which we have just recalled. As we shall see, it is otherwise in rapture, which seizes the soul abruptly and violently in order to raise it to lofty contemplation; then it precedes this contemplation instead of following it.

In ecstatic love, is there still liberty and merit? There most certainly is;²⁴⁴⁹ as St. Thomas shows,²⁴⁵⁰ the liberty of the act of love, the condition of merit, disappears only when the soul sees God face to face in heaven. Then it is invincibly attracted by Him and loves Him with a love that is sovereignly spontaneous but no longer free; it is a love superior to liberty.

The duration of divine ecstasy varies greatly; complete ecstasy generally lasts only some minutes, sometimes for half an hour. However, there are cases of prolonged incomplete ecstasy, which St. Teresa says "lasts occasionally for an entire day."²⁴⁵¹ There are even complete ecstasies which have lasted as much as four days, or even longer.²⁴⁵²

Ecstasy ordinarily ends by a spontaneous awakening; only little by little does the soul recover the use of its senses, as if it were returning from another world. The awakening may be provoked by an oral or simply a mental command given by a religious superior. In this connection it should be observed that, in the judgment of the Church, religious obedience during ecstasy is one of the characteristic signs of its divine origin, and a sign which eliminates the hypothesis of hysteria. The ecstatic who does not obey a religious superior lacks the sign considered by the Church as a touchstone, which shows the conformity of the ecstatic's will with the divine will expressed by the superior. It should, in fact, be kept clearly in mind that if in hysteria there is suggestion by hypnosis, it is only through the influence of an imperious will and a strong imagination on a sickly sensibility, with surrender of the will and no merit. In this case there is lacking the moral character of religious obedience, in which, through virtue, a human will subjects itself to the divine will, and even comes out of ecstasy to obey in this way.

False ecstasies are often easy to discern from true ones. The ecstasy of divine origin differs greatly from the so-called hysterical ecstasy, because in the divine there is no trace of the character of morbid excitation, of strained and passionate agitation, of entirely physical enjoyment followed by great depression. Divine ecstasy is a movement of the entire being, body and soul, toward the divine object that is contemplated. In a great calm, it is the absorption of the soul ravished out of its senses by a mysterious power, generally following a vision received in the imagination or the intellect.²⁴⁵³ The end of the ecstasy is the return to the natural state in a calm manner, accompanied by simple regret over the disappearance of the vision and the celestial joy that it gave. This was observed in particular in the ecstasies of St. Bernadette Soubirous, likewise in those of St. Teresa and many other servants of God.

It should be noted also that the natural swoon may have as its cause an excessive over-excitement of the imagination or even the lively impressions of mental prayer on a frail and weak constitution. These swoons should be eliminated as much as possible; they should be resisted and the organism strengthened by more substantial food.²⁴⁵⁴

Lastly, it should be kept in mind that there can be diabolical ecstasies, which are a sort of obsession. If a person lives in sin and seems to have ecstasies during which he gives way to unseemly contortions, utters incoherent words which he immediately forgets, seeks frequented places that he may become a spectacle, and if besides, in this state, he receives communications leading to evil or to good for an evil end, these are so many signs, as Benedict XIV declares, of diabolical ecstasy.²⁴⁵⁵

WHAT DISTINGUISHES RAPTURE FROM ECSTASY

Simple ecstasy is a sort of swoon which is produced sweetly following a wound of love. St. Teresa says: “The soul is conscious of having received a delicious wound but cannot discover how, nor who gave it, yet recognizes it as a most precious grace and hopes the hurt will never heal. The soul makes amorous complaints to its Bridegroom, even uttering them aloud; nor can it control itself, knowing that though He is present He will not manifest Himself so that it may enjoy Him.”²⁴⁵⁶ It is like a fleeting interview before more continual union, called the transforming union or spiritual marriage.

The swoon of ecstasy differs from the impetuosity and violence of rapture, in which the soul is suddenly seized by God as by a superior force that carries it away. St. Thomas noted this. He says: “Rapture adds something to ecstasy. For ecstasy means simply a going out of oneself by being placed outside one’s proper order; while rapture denotes a certain violence in addition.”²⁴⁵⁷

Often the spiritual espousals are concluded in rapture;²⁴⁵⁸ the soul is as if inebriated and can concern itself only with God. Rapture is followed by the flight of the spirit, in which the soul believes itself transported into a new, wholly divine region.²⁴⁵⁹

THE EFFECTS OF ECSTATIC UNION

Such absorption in God produces great detachment from creatures, whose nothingness becomes more and more apparent; it also gives rise to immense sorrow for sins committed and for all that separates the soul from God. The soul also sees with increasing clearness the value of our Savior’s passion and of Mary’s sufferings at the foot of the cross, and from this contemplation draws admirable patience to bear the trials which the Lord will send it that it may work for its neighbor’s salvation.

In short, the effects of ecstatic union are great holiness of life. For this reason St. Francis de Sales says: “When you see a person who has raptures in prayer... and, nevertheless, no ecstasy in his life, that is, does not lead a lofty life of union with God, by the abnegation of worldly desires and the mortification of natural wishes and inclinations, by interior sweetness, simplicity, humility, and especially by continual charity, believe me, Theotime, all these raptures are seriously doubtful and dangerous.”²⁴⁶⁰

THE PURIFICATION OF LOVE

After ecstatic union, as a preparation for the transforming union, there is a very painful purification of love, of which St. Teresa speaks at the end of the sixth mansion. The saint says:

The heart receives, it knows not how or whence, a blow as from a fiery dart... in the very depths and center of the soul... This resembles the pains of purgatory.... The spiritual torments are so much more keen that the bodily ones remain unnoticed.... She feels a strange loneliness, finding no companionship in any earthly creature.... Meanwhile all society is a torture to her. She is like one suspended in mid-air, who can neither touch the earth nor mount to heaven; she is unable to reach the water while parched with thirst and this is not a thirst that can be borne, but one which nothing will quench.... Though this torment and grief could not, I think, be surpassed by any earthly cross..., yet they appeared to her as nothing in comparison with their recompense. The soul realizes that it has not merited anguish which is of such measureless value.²⁴⁶¹

In the same chapter of the sixth mansion, the saint goes on to say: “This agony does not continue for long in its full violence—never, I believe, longer than three or four hours; were it prolonged, the weakness of our nature could not endure it except by a miracle.... This favor entails great suffering but leaves most precious graces within the soul, which loses all fear of any crosses it may henceforth meet with, for in comparison with the acute anguish it has gone through, all else seems nothing.... It is also much more detached from creatures, having learned that no one but its Creator can bring it consolation and strength.”²⁴⁶²

We shall now discuss the supreme development on earth of the life of grace in souls that have undergone the passive purification of the spirit, described by St. John of the Cross in *The Dark Night*²⁴⁶³ and by St. Teresa in *The Interior Castle*.²⁴⁶⁴

On emerging from these interior trials, the soul receives such knowledge of the divine majesty that it is at times absorbed in God, as Archimedes was by his discoveries, to such an extent that he did not hear speech addressed to him. At other times, the soul exults and cannot refrain from singing the praises of God. In this connection St. Teresa says: “So excessive is its jubilee that the soul will not enjoy it alone, but speaks of it to all around so that they may help it to praise God, which is its one desire.”²⁴⁶⁵ Thus St. Dominic spoke only to God or of God and spent his nights in prayer at the foot of the altar; St. Thomas Aquinas also prayed for hours at night before the Blessed Sacrament.

This holy joy of soul, the fruit of union with God, may be desired, says St. Teresa,^{[2466](#)} whereas it is in no way fitting to desire visions and revelations, for they are extraordinary favors entirely distinct from the full development of the life of grace in our souls. St. Teresa declares: “Know that for having received many favors of this kind, you will not merit more glory, but will be the more stringently obliged to serve, since you have received more.... There are many saints who never knew what it was to receive one such favor, while others who have received them are not saints at all.... Indeed, for one that is granted, the soul bears many a cross.”^{[2467](#)}

Finally, at the end of its earthly ascent toward God, the soul is introduced into the transforming union, described especially by St. Teresa and St. John of the Cross, who bring a precision of statement on this point to what the greatest spiritual writers who preceded them had said. Using their description, we shall see the graces which sometimes accompany the transforming union, next the essential nature of this union, its theological explanation, and its fruits.

The Transforming Union, Prelude of the Union of Heaven

THE GRACES WHICH SOMETIMES ACCOMPANY THE TRANSFORMING UNION

The spiritual marriage is at times celebrated with expressive symbolism: the favored person receives a ring set with precious stones, which from then on he sees from time to time; he hears celestial canticles. This sensible symbolism is also at times accompanied by an apparition of our Lord and by an intellectual vision of the Blessed Trinity. St. Teresa mentions these two graces which she personally received.²⁴⁶⁸ She also notes: “Those whom our Lord admits into the seventh mansion... are constantly in the company of Christ our Lord both in His humanity and His divinity.”²⁴⁶⁹

The intellectual vision of the Blessed Trinity which certain persons receive in this state shows them by an infused idea and an eminent light the real distinction between the three Persons and the unity of Their nature incomparably better than the best theologian could by developing the congruous arguments relative to this mystery. The soul thus favored has not yet the immediate vision of the divine essence; it does not possess the intrinsic evidence of the mystery; it does not yet see that if God were not triune, He would not be God. The soul still remains in the order of faith, but its faith becomes singularly penetrating, luminous, and sweet. It grasps far better than before that the Father is God, that the Son is God, that the Holy Ghost is God, and, nevertheless, that the Father is not the Son, and that neither the Father nor the Son is the Holy Ghost. It sees dimly, so to speak, that the Father in His infinite fecundity communicates the entire divine nature to the Son, and the Father and the Son communicate it to the Holy Ghost by the most perfect diffusion of the divine goodness and in the most intimate communion. The soul sees in the Blessed Trinity an eminent exemplar of Eucharistic Communion and of the closest union of the soul with its Creator and Father, according to the words of Jesus: “That they may be one as We also are one.”

This intellectual vision of the Blessed Trinity, which is inferior to the beatific vision, is of varying and intermittent clarity. It does not seem necessarily linked to the transforming union according to the description given of it by St. John of the Cross.²⁴⁷⁰ He does not say that this state requires essentially extraordinary graces, although it implies a very lofty contemplation of the divine perfections.

THE ESSENTIAL NATURE OF THE TRANSFORMING UNION

St. Teresa notes that in this stage ecstasies cease as a rule: “The infirmity [of ecstasy] formerly so troublesome to the mind and impossible to get over, disappears at once. Probably this is because our Lord has now strengthened, dilated, and developed the soul.”²⁴⁷¹ Thus union with God, which can now take place without troubling the exercise of the faculties, becomes almost continual. It seems indeed that the Blessed Virgin was always in this state, and it is also said that St. Hildegarde never knew the weakness of ecstasy.

According to St. John of the Cross,²⁴⁷² the essential basis of this wholly eminent state is in no way miraculous; it is, says the saint, “the perfect state of the spiritual life,” being here on earth the culminating point of the development of the life of grace and of the love of God, and the closest union with the Blessed Trinity, which dwells in every soul in the state of grace.

In the transforming union the higher faculties are drawn to the innermost center of the soul where the Blessed Trinity dwells.²⁴⁷³ Under this grace the soul cannot doubt the presence in it of the divine Persons and is almost never deprived of Their company. “The soul learns that it is God who gives it ‘life,’ by certain secret intuitions,” says St. Teresa.²⁴⁷⁴

St. John of the Cross, in *The Living Flame of Love*, explains this union by several images:

Thus fire or a stone tend by their natural force to the center of their sphere.... When a stone shall have reached the center of the earth and is incapable of further motion of its own, we say of it that it is then in its inmost or deepest center.

The center of the soul is God. When the soul shall have reached Him according to its essence, and according to the power of its operations, it will then have attained to its ultimate and deepest center in God. This will be when the soul shall love Him, comprehend Him, and enjoy Him with all its strength. When, however, the soul has not attained to this state,... it is not in the deepest center, because there is still room for it to advance.... But if the soul shall have attained to the highest degree of love, the love of God will then wound it in its inmost depth or center, and the soul will be transformed and enlightened in the highest degree in its substance, faculties, and strength, until it shall become most like unto God. The soul in this state may be compared to crystal, lucid and pure; the greater the light thrown upon it, the more luminous it becomes by the concentration thereof, until at last it seems to be all light and indistinguishable from it; it being then so illumined, and to the utmost extent, that it seems to be one with the light itself.²⁴⁷⁵

A little farther on, St. John of the Cross uses another image: “It is the same fire that first disposes the wood for combustion and afterward consumes it.”²⁴⁷⁶ It is still wood, but incandescent wood, which has taken on the properties of fire. Thus from the

purified heart a flame rises almost ceaselessly toward God.

St. Teresa uses still another figure for this spiritual state, comparing it to rain: “Thus rain which falls from heaven into a river is so mingled with it that it can no longer be distinguished from it.” The figure of two candles whose flames unite to form a single flame, has also been used to describe this union, which is like a fusion of the soul’s life and God’s. As a result, we understand why St. John of the Cross describes the transforming union as the state of spiritual perfection, the full development of the grace of the virtues and the gifts: “The perfect spiritual life,” he says, “consists in the possession of God by the union of love.”²⁴⁷⁷

The transforming union is, therefore, most intimate; it brings with it great, inalterable peace, at least to the summit of the higher faculties. Yet the soul thus favored may still at times be “sorrowful unto death” if Jesus wishes to associate it with His life of reparation and lead it to Gethsemane for the salvation of sinners. In the Garden of Olives, He himself had more than the transforming union; with the hypostatic union, He had the beatific vision, and yet He willed to experience mortal sadness that His holocaust might be perfect.

THE THEOLOGICAL EXPLANATION OF THIS STATE

In *A Spiritual Canticle*, St. John of the Cross writes of the interior cellars thus: “These cellars are seven in number, and the soul has entered into them all when it has in perfection the seven gifts of the Holy Ghost, so far as it is possible for it.... Many souls reach and enter the first cellar, each according to the perfection of its love, but the last and inmost cellar is entered by few in this world, because therein is wrought the perfect union with God, the union of the spiritual marriage.”²⁴⁷⁸

In other words, when the soul perfectly possesses the gift of wisdom, the highest of the seven gifts received in baptism with sanctifying grace, it has reached its inner sanctuary where the Blessed Trinity dwells, and union with God is no longer only habitual, but actual and in some measure transforming. In spite of the infinite distance separating the creature’s being from that of the Creator, it is a union of quasi-experimental knowledge and very intimate love, in which the soul is deified by receiving perfect participation in the divine nature. In this sense, St. Paul could write: “He who is joined to the Lord, is one spirit.”²⁴⁷⁹

In this case union is transforming because the soul, while keeping its created nature, receives a great increase of sanctifying grace and charity, and because it is the characteristic of ardent love to transform us morally into the person loved who is like another self, *alter ego*, for whom we wish, as we do for ourselves, all suitable goods. If this person is divine, holy souls wish Him to reign ever more profoundly in them, to be closer to them than they are to themselves, closer than the air they breathe is to their lungs, and the freshened blood to their hearts.²⁴⁸⁰

St. John of the Cross himself, therefore, gives the theological explanation of this state, which he sums up in a principle enunciated in the *Ascent of Mount Carmel*: “The more pure and clean the soul in the perfection of a living faith, the greater is the infusion of charity, and the greater the charity, the greater the illumination and the more abundant the graces.”²⁴⁸¹

St. Thomas says likewise that the seven gifts are connected with charity; consequently, just as the infused virtues, they grow with it, like the parts of one and the same organism, or “like the five fingers of the hand.”²⁴⁸²

Evidently there are many degrees in the transforming union. St. John of the Cross points out this fact in *A Spiritual Canticle*,²⁴⁸³ apropos of the spiritual betrothals, in which the soul enjoys perfect union in a transitory way, whereas in the spiritual marriage the soul possesses it in a quasi-continual manner.

According to St. Teresa,²⁴⁸⁴ the fruitive union of the betrothal lasts scarcely more than half an hour, during which the soul has experimental knowledge of God really present in it and of His embrace.

In the spiritual marriage, which is ratified on earth and will be consummated in heaven, the actual union of love with God experimentally known in the center of the soul becomes more constant. According to several authors, this state is, as it were, the equivalent of a special revelation which gives the soul the certitude of being in the state of grace and, some writers add, a certitude of its predestination. This last point may be verified in many cases, but, as we shall see, it is not certain that it is verified as a rule.

St. John of the Cross says in *A Spiritual Canticle*: “We are not to suppose that all souls, thus far advanced, receive all that is here described, either in the same way or in the same degree of knowledge and of consciousness. Some souls receive more, others less; some in one way, some in another; and yet all may be in the state of spiritual betrothal.”²⁴⁸⁵ Likewise, there are many degrees in the quasi-continual transforming union, under a more or less manifest form, up to the highest degree which the Blessed Virgin Mary enjoyed on earth. In these different degrees, it may be truthfully said that souls, according to their predestination, have attained here on earth their deepest center. This is the perfect realization of Christ’s prayer: “That they may be one, as We also are one: I in them, and Thou in Me;... that the world may know that Thou... hast loved them, as Thou hast also loved Me.”²⁴⁸⁶

THE EFFECTS OF THE TRANSFORMING UNION

The effects of this state of perfection are those of the theological virtues and of the gifts which have attained their full development. One of the fruits of this union is that which was granted to the apostles on Pentecost, confirmation in grace. St. John of the Cross says: "I believe that no soul ever attains to this state without being confirmed in grace."²⁴⁸⁷

The Carmelites of Salamanca explain this confirmation in grace as a certain participation in the impeccability of the blessed through a great increase in charity whose progress turns us more and more away from sin. This notable increase of divine love is completed by a special protection of God, who removes the occasions of sin and strengthens the soul when necessary, so that it is henceforth always preserved from mortal sin and even almost always from deliberate venial sin.²⁴⁸⁸

Is the soul that has reached this state certain of no longer offending God and of obtaining the grace of final perseverance? St. Teresa simply says that it is almost freed from the disturbance of the passions, that as long as it is under the actual grace of the transforming union it does not sin venially with full deliberation. She writes: "The accustomed movements of the faculties and imagination do not appear to take place in any way that can injure the soul or disturb its peace. Do I seem to imply that after God has brought the soul thus far it is certain to be saved and cannot fall into sin again? I do not mean this; whenever I say that the soul seems in security, I must be understood to imply for as long as His Majesty thus holds it in His care and it does not offend Him."²⁴⁸⁹

This text shows that St. Teresa is less categorical than St. John of the Cross, who goes so far as to say in *A Spiritual Canticle*: "The soul has left on one side and forgotten all temptations, trials, sorrows, anxieties, and cares."²⁴⁹⁰ St. Teresa's manner of speaking seems more conformable to that of theology, which teaches that the grace of final perseverance cannot be merited, and that to be assured of salvation one would have to have a special revelation about one's own predestination. This last point was even defined by the Council of Trent.²⁴⁹¹ Now we cannot affirm as certain that the transforming union implies in all its degrees and in every case the equivalent of such a revelation. Moreover, after receiving a revelation, one may, under certain temptations, doubt its divine origin.

We should not forget the unusually significant example of the great St. Paul of the Cross, founder of the Passionists, who passed through the purifying night of the spirit about the age of twenty-six, and received the grace of the transforming union at twenty-nine. Destined to reach the age of eighty-one and to found an order vowed to reparation, he lived from the time he was thirty-one until he was seventy-five in an almost continual reparatory night of the spirit, during which several times he questioned whether he would be saved.²⁴⁹²

Perhaps with the reservation "under the actual grace of union," the following statement of St. John of the Cross should be understood: "Finally, all the motions and acts of the soul, proceeding from the principle of its natural and imperfect life, are now changed in this union with God into divine motions. For the soul, as the true child of God, is moved by the Spirit of God, as it is written: 'Whosoever are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God' (Rom.8:14)"²⁴⁹³

We are not ignorant of the fact that in speaking of the transforming union Philip of the Blessed Trinity²⁴⁹⁴ and Scaramelli²⁴⁹⁵ consider that so sublime a state requires that God reveal to the soul the indissoluble friendship that exists between them. According to these authors, if the person thus favored does not receive a special revelation of his predestination, there is, as it were, an equivalent of this special revelation.

We believe that it suffices to affirm that the Holy Ghost then greatly confirms the certitude of hope. This certitude is, as St. Thomas says,²⁴⁹⁶ a certitude of tending toward salvation without being as yet the certitude of salvation itself. Now the Holy Ghost confirms this security of hope by the increasingly filial and strong affection which He excites in us. Then is fully verified St. Paul's statement: "The Spirit Himself giveth testimony to our spirit that we are the sons of God."²⁴⁹⁷

In this state there are at times divine touches so profound that they are, the mystics say, "impressed on the substance of the soul." What is the meaning of this expression in the light of the principles of theology as St. Thomas understood them?

The divine touch is a most profound supernatural motion which acts on the very depth of the will and the intellect where these faculties take root in the substance of the soul, from which they emanate. God is closer to us than we are to ourselves, inasmuch as He immediately preserves the substance of our soul by a divine act which is the continuation of the creative act. Likewise He preserves sanctifying grace in the very essence of the soul, and at certain moments, by a special inspiration, He moves the very depths of our will and intellect from within in order to incline them toward Himself. Therein is a contact, not quantitative and spatial but supraspatial, spiritual, and absolutely immediate, of the divine essence with the substance of our soul, and from this contact proceed in the depths of our higher faculties direct acts to which God alone can move us and which we would never produce without this special inspiration. The soul can act only through its faculties, that is, it can know only by its intellect, love and will only by its will; but in this case, under the divine touch, it acts by the most intimate depth of its faculties, there where they take root in the essence of the soul.

In it there is a spiritual embrace of God, which at certain moments is extremely strong. There is also at times in the depths of the higher faculties a wound of love, a delicious spiritual wound, which is occasionally accompanied, as in the stigmatics, by a painful wound of the body, in particular in the region of the heart.²⁴⁹⁸ It is God who wounds the soul while drawing it strongly

to Himself and giving it a very ardent desire to see Him immediately and never again to be separated from Him. This burning desire of the beatific vision is the normal disposition to receive it without delay. A similar desire also exists in its way in the souls in purgatory when they are approaching the end of their purification.

In the epilogue to *The Interior Castle*, St. Teresa invites her sisters humbly to desire this intimate union with God, but not to wish to force their entrance into this mansion: “Therefore I advise you to use no violence if you meet with any obstacle, for that would displease Him so much that He would never give you admission to them. He dearly loves humility: if you think yourselves unworthy to enter the third mansion, He will grant you all the sooner the favor of entering the fifth. Then, if you serve Him well there and often repair to it, He will draw you into the mansion where He dwells Himself.”²⁴⁹⁹

The saint’s words make clear that the state of spiritual perfection of which we are speaking is on earth the summit of the normal development of the life of grace, considered not precisely in a given person, but in itself. This summit should, in fact, imply this aspiration, that is, this very ardent desire for the beatific vision, which up to this stage did not exist in this degree. It is inconceivable that God should reveal Himself to souls not yet keenly desirous of possessing Him forever, of seeing Him immediately and forever. He prepares them for the immediate vision by a divine touch which has a savor of eternal life. St. John of the Cross speaks admirably of this favor, saying that divine touches are attained only by the practice of complete detachment from everything created,²⁵⁰⁰ and that by one of these touches of love the soul is rewarded for all its labors.²⁵⁰¹

About the wound of love, St. John of the Cross writes in *A Spiritual Canticle*, which he explains in *The Living Flame* :

O Living Flame of Love,
That woundest tenderly
My soul in its inmost depth!
As thou art no longer grievous,
Perfect thy work, if it be thy will,
Break the web of this sweet encounter.²⁵⁰²

In other words, complete the work of our union; break the thread of my earthly existence, which is the final obstacle to my meeting with the Well-Beloved. This veil allows me to see God imperfectly, but it is still an obstacle to immediate and definitive union.

The living flame is the Holy Ghost who excites in the soul acts of love which are more meritorious than all it has elicited before it reached this state, says the saint in the explanation of this first stanza. He adds: “O how wonderful the fire of God! though so vehement and so consuming, though it can destroy a thousand worlds with more ease than material fire can destroy a single straw, it consumes not the spirit wherein it burns.... Thus on the day of Pentecost the fire descended with great vehemence upon the Apostles, who... sweetly burned interiorly.”²⁵⁰³

In his explanation of verse five of the second stanza of *The Living Flame*, St. John of the Cross wrote this significant passage: “Why is it that so few ever attain to this state [of perfection and of union with God]? The reason is that in this marvelous work which God Himself begins, so many are weak, shrinking from trouble, and unwilling to endure the least discomfort or mortification, or to labor with constant patience. Hence it is that God, not finding them diligent in cultivating the graces He has given them when He began to try them, proceeds no further with their purification, neither does He lift them up out of the dust of the earth, because it required greater courage and resolution for this than they possessed.... They are few in number who deserve to be made perfect through sufferings so as to attain to so high a state as this.”²⁵⁰⁴ The soul must pass through many tribulations to reach “the perfect spiritual life, which consists in the possession of God by the union of love.”²⁵⁰⁵

Truly spiritual delights come from the cross, from the spirit of sacrifice which puts to death all that is inordinate in us in order to assure the first place to the love of God and of souls in God.

When the heart thus burns with love for its God, the soul contemplates lamps of fire which illumine all things from above. These lamps are the divine perfections: wisdom, goodness, mercy, justice, providence, eternity, omnipotence. They are, so to speak, the colors of the divine rainbow, which are identical without destroying each other in the intimate life of God, in the Deity, as the seven colors of the earthly rainbow fuse in the white light from which they proceed. “God, therefore,” says St. John of the Cross, “according to this knowledge of Him in unity, is to the soul as many lamps, because it has the knowledge of each of them [these attributes], and because they minister to it the warmth of love, each in its own way, and yet all of one subject, all one lamp.”²⁵⁰⁶

These souls are characterized by great forgetfulness of self, a great desire to suffer in imitation of the example of our Lord. The soul participates in the very strength of Christ, in His immense love for men; it succeeds in practicing simultaneously virtues that apparently are most contradictory: justice and mercy, fortitude and meekness, the simplicity of the dove and the prudence of the serpent. It unites the most sublime contemplation to the most circumspect common sense in matters of which it must judge. Thus these souls are definitively marked with the image of Christ. The apostolic life (manifest or hidden) or the life of reparation overflows from the plenitude of their contemplation and union with God.²⁵⁰⁷

Such is manifestly the perfect disposition of the truly purified soul to pass immediately at the moment of death from earth to

heaven without having to go through purgatory. The perfect order is to be purified before death with merit, in order not to have to be purified after death without merit. Only in the close union we have described does the soul have an ardent desire to see God. It is inconceivable that God should show Himself immediately and forever to a soul not ardently desirous of seeing Him.

This doctrine would be too lofty for us if in baptism we had not received the life of grace, which should develop in us also into eternal life, nor often received Holy Communion, which has as its principal purpose to increase the love of God in us. Let us remember that each of our Communions should be substantially more fervent and fruitful than the preceding one. We shall then see that, as St. John of the Cross says, interior souls would reach the close union which we have just discussed if they did not flee from the trials which God sends them for their purification.²⁵⁰⁸

In the transforming union we see the full development of grace, which is eternal life begun, *quaedam inchoatio vitae aeternae*.²⁵⁰⁹

A NOTE ON THE HIGHEST DEGREE OF THE MYSTICAL LIFE

1 THE NAMELESS DEPTH OF THE SOUL AND THE DEITY

Tauler describes as follows the highest degree of the mystical life in the servants of God:

The peace of the highest degree is the essential peace of which it is written: “Seek after peace and pursue it.”²⁵¹⁰ They seek peace, and it follows them. This peace, “which surpasseth all understanding,”²⁵¹¹ follows upon the essential conversion. When what is unnamable and unnamed in the soul turns fully toward God, everything in man that has a name follows this unnamed depth of the soul and is likewise converted. To this conversion always answers that which is nameless, that which is Unnamed in God and also that which in God has a name; all this answers to conversion. In such a man, God proclaims His true peace, and man can then say: “I will hear what the Lord God will speak in me; for He will speak peace unto His people... and unto them that are converted unto the heart.”²⁵¹² Dionysius says that these men are formed in God. St. Paul must have been thinking of these men when he said: “That being rooted and founded in charity, you may be able to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth, and length, and height, and depth... of God.”

Do not imagine that I claim to have arrived at this degree. No master should, in truth, teach that which he himself has not experienced. Strictly speaking, it suffices that he love that of which he speaks, that he pursue it, and place no hindrance to it...²⁵¹³

Nature, which is too weak to bear such a life, must necessarily be broken, with the result that this man no longer has a single day of good health.... As St. Paul says: “Power is made perfect in infirmity.”²⁵¹⁴

However, this weakness does not come from exterior observances, but from the superabundant outpouring of the divinity, which inundates this man to such a point that his poor body of clay cannot bear it. For God has so drawn this man into Himself that man thus becomes “deicolored,” to such an extent that God Himself performs the works of this man.... It is in such souls that God finds His glory....

When they plunge into this bottomless sea, no longer do they have definite words or thoughts.... At this time man buries himself so deeply in his unfathomable nothingness that he retains absolutely nothing for himself... and gives back all that he has received from God, the Author of every good.... There the spirit [of man] is lost in the spirit of God.... And yet this man becomes so profoundly human a man... so good to all that no defect can be found in him.... It is not to be believed that such souls may ever be separated from God. May this be the portion of all of us! May God help us to attain it! Amen.²⁵¹⁵

2 THE HOLY GHOST LIFTS UP THE SOUL AND PRAYS IN IT

In the Sermon for the Second Sunday of Lent,²⁵¹⁶ Tauler also speaks of the pursuit of God:

It provokes an appealing cry of immense power... It is a sigh coming from an endless depth and far exceeding nature. The Holy Ghost Himself must utter this sigh in us, as St. Paul says: “The Spirit Himself asketh for us with unspeakable groanings.”²⁵¹⁷... When the poor man thus pursued experiences this immense anxiety and cries to God with inexpressible sighs and with such a desire that his appeal penetrates even the loftiest heavens, if God then acts as if He heard absolutely nothing or wished to know nothing, how greatly at this moment in the depths of the soul man’s desire should reach out and become more urgent!... Then the soul, while abasing and humbling itself, should pray with confidence like the woman of Canaan: “Yea, Lord; for the whelps also eat of the crumbs that fall from the table of their masters.”²⁵¹⁸... These roads, and these alone, lead in truth, and without an intermediary station, even to God.²⁵¹⁹

In a manuscript dealing with this subject, we read:

In this immensely powerful cry of appeal there is an act of love of God which pierces the clouds, an act of love not obtained by impetuous outbursts. It is Jesus who passes by and gives rise in the soul to a movement which is extremely calm, tranquil like the peace of God, but which issues from the most profound depths of the heart, where love dwells, and goes forth and touches Jesus in the unfathomable depths of eternity. This act of love is absolutely distinct from the most fervent acts that we ourselves make. When Jesus forms it in the soul, the soul perceives it because a little of its life ascends toward God. It is not so much the Lord who, by a divine touch, reaches the depths of the soul, but rather it is the soul which, lifted up by Him, rushes rapidly toward Him, as by a flight of incomparable gentleness, by an act of love which God alone can produce in it.²⁵²⁰

These acts of love are always promptly followed by crosses, by great crosses. But everything goes well in this way.

This is progressive configuration to our Lord.

A soul that seems to be approaching this state wrote the following lines which are reminiscent of the pages we have just quoted from Tauler:

In prayer I sometimes feel this tearing of myself away from myself which carries all my being into “An Other,” a tearing away which is brought about without any violence, but with power and gentleness, and with the sweet and complete consent of my will; this is my part. But what is the Lord’s part?... At the term of this movement (if I may thus express myself, for in this prayer this movement is continuous) I have felt as if two great arms entwined me; it was the Abyss which closed over and swallowed me up in its infinite depths. When a ship sinks, the waters of the sea open up to receive it, then silently close over it. This is something similar...

My whole being would break its bonds and cast itself into the Other. Although often I do nothing in prayer, there is always, more or less, this secret and imperceptible movement which would draw me whither I cannot go.... All graces, all supernatural impulsions emanate from this innermost depth wherein God acts, and literally bear me away into this infinite abyss. It is God within me who bears me away in Himself out of myself. Sometimes I feel that the grace is not completed, that it stops at the threshold of a grace of full union.... Were the grace to attain its normal term each time, the result would be the embrace of two spirits in a silence like that of eternity; but I remain on the threshold.

When a grace of this kind is given to me, my active intellect and will are warned by the substance of my very soul, as, for example, when it is extremely cold, I feel the cold before thinking that the weather is cold. This physical experience precedes the judgment of the mind; similarly, the experience felt in the substance of the soul (evidently, it is from the experimental and mystical point of view and not from the philosophical point of view that I speak of the substance of the soul) precedes the idea of the gift received. Inversely, if I deliberately propose to touch an object that I know is very cold, the thought of the cold precedes the physical experience of the cold that I am about to feel. Likewise, my will and intellect can in an instant awaken the inert experience in the depths of my soul which awaits but a stimulus to be revived. When my soul is powerless and empty, I do indeed deliberately intensify my oblation, and this act provokes at long intervals as it were an awakening.

4 DIFFERENT MEANINGS OF THE TITLE “SPOUSE”

In view of certain observations that have been made to us, we believe it advisable in a discussion of the transforming union to signalize the following points.

Some very loving, greatly tried, and extremely generous souls live closely united to God in the world, and their director may early believe that they have entered the transforming union. This judgment may, however, be precipitate, for, before attaining to the spiritual marriage, the chosen soul must first become a spouse, as a simple religious is who has made profession after the trials and generous acts of the novitiate.

There may be a notable error of interpretation in this decision if the director or the directed soul attributes to the title of spouse, received occasionally in an interior locution, the same meaning as that of the far superior title of spouse in the transforming union. There is a great difference between the term spouse, used to denote a religious who has made profession, and the title spouse, as applied to St. Catherine of Siena and St. Teresa. Moreover, even in the second sense, the perfect soul, though confirmed in grace, may not believe that it has attained the goal, for until its last sigh it will remain on the royal road, seeing this goal in a very consoling light, while recalling the words of St. Paul: “Not as though I had already attained or were already perfect; but I follow after.”²⁵²¹

Again, a soul much loved by God is drawn to Him, and gives itself. It is very generous, wholly loving, pure, and its crosses become heavy. After an interior locution, the Lord seems to choose it as a spouse. May this soul believe that it is in the transforming union? Is this not simply the normal state of a good religious after profession? For this chosen soul still has numerous defects and imperfections, which seem incompatible with the spiritual marriage. But the director may believe that this soul will attain to this state when its charity is wholly true and its life completely impregnated with God.

The life of St. Gemma Galgani, for example, shows clearly what the Lord required of her before permitting her to call herself His spouse. This valiant saint, who never refused anything to grace, complained at times of these demands.

Another case is that of a married woman, who is partly emancipated from what has become for her humiliating servitude and who is generous in her sacrifices. Our Lord holds her soul captive and urges her to belong to Him alone. As a result she is somewhat inclined to believe that she is in the transforming union. In our opinion she is accepted as a spouse in the sense that a religious is after final profession, and we believe that if the mystical marriage is granted to this person, it will be only later on, for this beautiful soul is still too much encumbered with herself. All worldly nets are not odious to her. Her charity does not at all measure up to that of a soul united to God by the spiritual marriage. More profound trials will perhaps not delay in making this evident.

The transforming union is, undoubtedly, given in different degrees, but the least degree requires perfect charity toward God and one’s neighbor. Who can tell it without having attained to that state where there is no longer any insufficiency, where an unknown food is served to the well-beloved who, filled but still famished, utter ineffable groans?

5 THE DESIRE OF THE TRANSFORMING UNION

May a generous person, who truly seems to have passed through at least a part of the night of the spirit, desire and ask for the grace of the transforming union?

Certainly. This grace is here on earth the term of the more or less conscious aspirations of such a soul. If an explicit desire is in question, however, it is advisable to give it a more objective expression, that is, desiring the ever more profound reign of God in our souls and their more perfect configuration to our Lord. Besides, it is also advisable to keep in mind what St. Teresa points out in the epilogue to *The Interior Castle*: “It is true you cannot enter all the mansions by your own power, however great it may appear to you, unless the Lord of the castle Himself admits you. Therefore I advise you to use no violence if you meet with any obstacle, for that would displease Him so much that He would never give you admission to them. He dearly loves humility: if you think yourselves unworthy to enter the third mansion, He will grant you all the sooner the favor of entering the fifth. Then, if you serve Him well there and often repair to it, He will draw you into the mansion where He dwells Himself.... When once you have learned how to enjoy this castle, you will always find rest, however painful your trials may be, in the hope of returning to your Lord, which no one can prevent.”

Let us also remember what St. John of the Cross says in *The Living Flame*: “O souls that seek your own ease and comfort, if you knew how necessary for this high state is suffering, and how profitable suffering and mortification are for attaining to these great blessings.”²⁵²² He likewise writes in *A Spiritual Canticle*: “O that men would understand how impossible it is to enter the thicket, the manifold riches of the wisdom of God, without entering into the thicket of manifold suffering making it the desire and consolation of the soul; and how that the soul which really longs for the divine wisdom, longs first of all for the sufferings of the cross, that it may enter in.... They who desire to enter in that way are few, while those who desire the joys that come by it are many.”²⁵²³

In the following stanza, St. John of the Cross says: “One of the reasons which most influence the soul to enter into the ‘thicket’ of the wisdom of God, and to have a more intimate knowledge of the beauty of the divine wisdom, is, as I have said, that it may unite the understanding with God in the knowledge of the mysteries of the Incarnation, as of all His works the highest and most full of sweetness, and the most delicious knowledge.... But the soul cannot reach these hidden treasures unless it first passes through the thicket of interior and exterior suffering.”²⁵²⁴

Certainly this end, the prelude of heaven, is highly desirable; but the soul must be willing to take the royal road which leads to it.²⁵²⁵

6 THE INTIMACY OF THE TRANSFORMING UNION

The intimacy of the transforming union, it should be noted, is due to an absolutely eminent operating grace. Of operating grace in general, in contradistinction to cooperating grace, St. Thomas says: “The operation of an affect is not attributed to the thing moved but to the mover. Hence in that effect in which our mind is moved and does not move, but in which God is the sole mover, the operation is attributed to God, and it is with reference to this that we speak of operating grace.”²⁵²⁶ The will, however, freely consents to be moved.

The human will indubitably continues to exist, since it will subsist even in beatific love; it is not physically absorbed in God, as the pantheists would say in this case. We must hold what St. John of the Cross so well expresses in *A Spiritual Canticle*: “Though in heaven the will of the soul is not destroyed, it is so intimately united with the power of the will of God, who loves it, that it loves Him as strongly and as perfectly as it is loved by Him.... Thus the soul loves God with the will and strength of God Himself, being made one with that very strength of love wherewith itself is loved by God. This strength is of the Holy Ghost, in whom the soul is there transformed. He is given to the soul to strengthen its love; ministering to it, and supplying in it, because of its transformation in glory, that which is defective in it.”²⁵²⁷

7 THE EQUALITY OF LOVE

Consequently, as Father Gabriel of St. Magdalen²⁵²⁸ well explains, one can understand that the soul reaches a certain equality of love with God. St. John says in *The Living Flame* :

Thus, then, the soul, by reason of its transformation, being a shadow of God, effects through God in God what He effects within it Himself by Himself, because the will of both is one. And as God is giving Himself with a free and gracious will, so the soul also with a will, the more free and the more generous the more it is united with God in God, is, as it were, giving back to God—in that loving complacency with which it regards the divine essence and perfections—God Himself.... The soul gives to the Beloved, who is God Himself, what He had given to it.

Herein it pays the whole debt, for the soul gives as much voluntarily with inestimable joy and delight, giving the Holy Spirit as its own of its own free will, so that God may be loved as He deserves to be. Herein consists the inestimable joy of the soul, for it sees that it offers to God what becomes Him in His infinite Being.²⁵²⁹

This is truly the prelude of the life of heaven.

8 CONCLUSION

Whence *A Spiritual Canticle* concludes: “O souls created for this [such grandeurs] and called thereto, what are you doing?

What are your occupations? Your aim is meanness, and your enjoyments misery. Oh, wretched blindness of the children of Adam, blind to so great a light and deaf to so clear a voice!”^{[2530](#)}

As Father Gabriel of St. Magdalen says: “This call, addressed by the saint to souls in general, shows us that he cannot regard as ‘extraordinary’ the sublime things he has just described for us.... That state, the flowering of the seed of supernatural life, which is sanctifying grace in the soul, should be within the reach of all those who are endowed with this grace.”^{[2531](#)}

The Perfection Of Love And The Mystical Union

OR THE MYSTICISM OF A Spiritual Canticle BY ST. JOHN OF THE CROSS²⁵³²

We reproduce here an article which appeared in *La Vie spirituelle* (January, 1936). We thank its author for permitting us to use it and also for having so well expressed what in our opinion is the true teaching of St. John of the Cross on several points of great importance.

I. THE PERFECTION OF LOVE AND INFUSED CONTEMPLATION

It has recently been affirmed that according to the spiritual teaching of Carmel, and of St. Teresa in particular, the perfection of love is found in the ascetical way and that infused contemplation is not at all necessary to sanctity.²⁵³³

God willingly grants these mystical graces to generous souls, they say. Consequently the soul does well to desire them, to prepare itself for them, and to tend to them, even to direct its whole life toward the contemplative ideal; nevertheless, they add, the fact remains that sanctity can be attained without them.

Moreover, they distinguish two kinds of contemplation: acquired contemplation and infused contemplation. The first may also be called mixed or active-passive contemplation; it is a latent mystical contemplation. They concede that this contemplation is in the normal way of sanctity. The second, mystical contemplation properly so called, experimentally passive or infused, especially in its higher degrees (the betrothal and the spiritual marriage), is not, they maintain, in the normal way.²⁵³⁴

This opinion, it seems to us, is not in harmony with the teaching of St. John of the Cross.²⁵³⁵

To affirm on the one hand that mystical contemplation is not necessary to perfection, and to maintain on the other that it is good to tend to it seems to us difficult to reconcile with the teaching of the Mystical Doctor. We know with what insistence he requires that the soul absolutely divest itself of all that is accidental, accessory, extraordinary, and not essential or necessary to perfection.²⁵³⁶ For St. John of the Cross the unique goal in this life is perfect union with God through the theological virtues; everything that is not necessary to this union—even graces in other regards precious—is, as soon as one dwells excessively on it, an obstacle. These things must be renounced, rejected, as far as possible; the soul must go beyond them and thus rest in emptiness, in the most absolute nudity of spirit. This is the very essence of the teaching of St. John of the Cross in *The Ascent of Mount Carmel* and in *The Dark Night*.²⁵³⁷ How, therefore, can we harmonize this doctrine of the void, excluding all that is accidental, with the seeking after a mystical contemplation that would be precisely something accidental?

This mortification of every desire, with the exception of that of divine union, this divesting oneself of all that is not God, constitutes for the soul the dark night, which is at the center of the saint's doctrine. If he leads the soul by this night to mystical, obscure, and general contemplation,²⁵³⁸ is it not that, in his opinion, this contemplation is part of the perfect union to which the denudation of the purifications tends, and that there is a necessary connection between perfect love, the fruit of denudation and of the purifications, and the mystical contemplation to which the soul has access through the dark night?

This is especially clear in *A Spiritual Canticle*, and we should like to show it. Our fundamental reason is summed up in the following argument.

The transforming union described in *A Spiritual Canticle* is certainly a very lofty mystical state; no one can deny it. Now this state is in the normal way of sanctity, since St. John calls it the union of love, the state of perfection, full union with God, full and perfect love.²⁵³⁹ Therefore even the most elevated mystical state, at least in its essential character, is in the normal way of sanctity.

Besides it would be difficult to comprehend how the perfection of love described by the saint in *A Spiritual Canticle*, could be attained without the help of mystical graces and of infused contemplation. We shall see this by an analysis of *A Spiritual Canticle*.

To the above we add a further consideration. If the connection between the state of perfect love and the mystical state of the betrothal or of the spiritual marriage were only accidental, St. John of the Cross would at each step have caused an unbelievable confusion by continually uniting them, without ever warning us that one can exist without the other. He affirms explicitly, on the contrary, that consummate perfection is obtained only in the state of the espousals and of spiritual marriage and that before this state is reached love is always imperfect. This is what we shall try to establish by evidence.²⁵⁴⁰

We shall show, first of all, that the union described in *A Spiritual Canticle* is the highest mystical state. By analysis of the

text we shall then establish that this union is in the normal line of the development of perfect charity, the necessary term of sanctity.

II. THE UNION DESCRIBED IN *A SPIRITUAL CANTICLE* IS MYSTICAL

First of all, we can easily establish that the union described in *A Spiritual Canticle* is the highest mystical union.

1) St. John calls this union the spiritual espousals, in its lower degree,²⁵⁴¹ and, in its higher degree, the spiritual marriage.²⁵⁴² Now, these expressions are commonly attributed to the mystical union; marriage denotes the most sublime union; the espousals refer to the union which immediately precedes the spiritual marriage. The union to which St. John of the Cross leads the soul is, therefore, the highest mystical union.

2) St. John of the Cross calls this union the transforming union, the transformation of the soul in God,²⁵⁴³ and these expressions, like that of the spiritual marriage, fittingly designate the highest mystical Union.

3) The Mystical Doctor attributes to the espousals the entrance into the “sweet science” that God teaches to the soul in this union; and “this science is mystical theology, which is the secret science of God, and which spiritual men call contemplation.”²⁵⁴⁴ Evidently mystical contemplation is meant. It is God who “bestows on the soul this science and knowledge in the love by which He communicates Himself to the soul”²⁵⁴⁵ In this luminous union God transforms the soul, “makes it completely His own and empties it of all that is alien to Himself,”²⁵⁴⁶ which cannot be done without the mystical graces.

In the higher degree of union we find infused contemplation more clearly described: “When the soul has been raised to the high state of spiritual marriage, the Bridegroom reveals to it, as His faithful consort, His own marvelous secrets most readily and most frequently, for he who truly and sincerely loves hides nothing from the object of his affections. The chief matter of His communications are the sweet mysteries of His Incarnation, the ways and means of the redemption, which is one of the highest works of God, and so is to the soul one of the sweetest.”²⁵⁴⁷ The Bridegroom does all this in this stanza which emphasizes with what tender love He discloses such mysteries interiorly to the soul.

The state which St. John of the Cross describes here is a state of love linked to a state of infused contemplation. The connection is owing to a necessity of love: “True and full love cannot hide anything.” This connection is not accidental, since this need is connatural to perfect charity. The observation is important.

4) The Mystical Doctor repeatedly affirms that it is God alone who acts and operates immediately in the soul in this state, that therein the soul passively receives contemplation.²⁵⁴⁸ But passivity characterizes precisely mystical contemplation.

s) Lastly, Sr. John of the Cross speaks of divine touches, of the contact of the divinity as characteristic of this union, as ordinarily produced in this state.²⁵⁴⁹ These are, certainly, very lofty mystical graces.

There is not, it seems, any doubt that the union described in *A Spiritual Canticle* is the most distinctly characterized and the loftiest mystical union.²⁵⁵⁰

This union is in the normal way. St. John of the Cross again and again describes the state to which the soul should tend: the spiritual marriage as full union with God, as consummated union, as the state of perfect love. He affirms that the full perfection of love is obtained only in the spiritual marriage.²⁵⁵¹

But full union with God, consummated perfection, perfect love are certainly in the normal way: this is the whole end of our life.²⁵⁵² It will suffice, therefore, to establish solidly that, in the opinion of the Mystical Doctor, the spiritual espousals, the spiritual marriage are simply the state of perfect love in order to conclude that he places them in the normal way of sanctity. The texts will furnish us abundant proof of this.

III. THE PERFECTION OF LOVE IN THE SPIRITUAL ESPOUSALS

St. 14. The Flight of Mystical Contemplation and the State of Union

In the thirteenth stanza St. John of the Cross describes the flight of the soul in this state of ardent love and great desires, which he set forth in the first stanzas.

In the fourteenth stanza he continues: “This spiritual flight signifies a certain high estate and union of love, whereunto, after many spiritual exercises, God is, wont to elevate the soul: it is called the spiritual betrothal of the Word, the Son of God.”²⁵⁵³

Here we have two very important affirmations: (1) the state of the spiritual espousals is nothing other than the state of union of love; (2) God is wont to elevate the soul to this state when it has greatly exercised itself in the spiritual life; which is equivalent to saying that this state is normal.

St. 24. The State of the Spiritual Espousals, the State of Perfect Love

St. John describes the state of the spiritual espousals as the state of perfect love and of perfect and heroic virtues. The soul says clearly that it is now united to the Beloved, since it has the solid virtues together with perfect charity. Therefore it calls this union of love a bed of flowers.²⁵⁵⁴ Moreover, the soul says that the bed is of flowers because in this state the virtues in the

soul are perfect and heroic, a condition impossible before there was a bed of flowers, the fruit of perfect union with God.

Perfect and heroic virtues cannot, therefore, exist before the union of the spiritual espousals; such virtues are the fruit of this union. Similarly, each of the virtues (the soul now possesses them in perfection) becomes like a den of lions. “The soul’s bed is encompassed by these dens of the virtues, because in this state its virtues are so perfectly ordered, and so joined together and bound up with one another in the consummate perfection of the soul, each supporting the other, that no part of it is weak or exposed. Not only is Satan unable to penetrate within it, but even worldly things, whether great or little, fail to disturb or annoy it, or even move it; for being now free from all molestation of natural affections, and a stranger to the worry of temporal anxieties, it enjoys in security and peace the participation of God.”²⁵⁵⁵

It is clear that for St. John the state of the spiritual espousals is the initial stage of the state of consummate perfection.

St. 26. The Inner Cellar and the Union of Most Intimate Love

St. John of the Cross describes here the state of the espousals and of the spiritual marriage as full union with God and as the supreme degree of love to which the soul can attain in this life. The soul sets forth in this stanza the very great grace that God gave it by making it enter the secret depths of His love which is the union or transformation of love in God. The cellar of which the soul speaks is the supreme degree of the most intimate love to which the soul can attain in this life; consequently the soul calls it the inner cellar, that is, the most secret. It uses this term because there are others less interior: such are the degrees of love through which the soul ascends to the highest. We may say that there are seven of these cellars. The soul will enter them all when it has in perfection the seven gifts of the Holy Ghost. In the inmost cellar is wrought the perfect union with God, the union of the spiritual marriage, of which the soul is now speaking.²⁵⁵⁶

Thus for St. John of the Cross the spiritual marriage is identified with full union with God. The effects of this union are then described: “Until the soul reaches the state of perfection, however spiritual it may be, there always remains a troop of desires, likings, and other imperfections, sometimes natural, sometimes spiritual, after which it runs, and which it tries to feed while following and satisfying them.... As to this flock, some men are more influenced by it than others; they run after and follow it, until they enter the inner cellar, where they lose it altogether, being then transformed in love. In this cellar the flock of imperfections is easily destroyed, as rust and mould on metal in the fire.”²⁵⁵⁷

It is evident that in the opinion of St. John of the Cross the highest degree of love and perfection is attained only in the state of the espousals and the spiritual marriage, in the “inner cellar.” Hence no one can say that the highest degree of love is outside the normal way of the saints.

St. 27. The State of the Spiritual Espousals and the Complete Impulsion of the Soul toward God

In this stanza St. John describes the state of the spiritual espousals as the state of perfect love, in which even the first movements of the will and the sensible appetites are directed toward God. It would be futile to wish to obtain such perfection actively by one’s own efforts in the purely ascetical life. And besides, St. John teaches explicitly that it is God Himself who causes this perfection in the soul by means of “mystical theology,” that is, by infused contemplation. St. John states that the “science full of sweetness” which God has taught the soul is mystical theology, “which is the secret science of God, and which spiritual men call contemplation.... God is the Author of this union, and of the purity and perfection requisite for it; and as the transformation of the soul in Himself makes it His, He empties it of all that is alien to Himself. Thus it comes to pass that, not in will only, but in act as well, the whole soul is entirely given to God without any reserve whatever, as God has given Himself freely unto it.... The soul is, as it were, absorbed in God, and even its first movements have nothing in them—so far as it can comprehend them—which is at variance with the will of God.... The first movements (in the understanding, the memory, the will, and the desires) of the soul which has attained to the spiritual state of which I am speaking are ordinarily directed to God, because of the great help and courage it derives from Him, and its perfect conversion to goodness.”

Evidently this degree of perfection is superior to human efforts; it can be attained only in the mystical way. On the other hand, it is the effect of a “union by exchange” which is in the normal development of charity.

St. 28. The Spiritual Espousals and the Activity of Love

St. John here describes the state of the spiritual espousals as the state of perfect love, in which all the higher and lower powers “are consecrated no longer to its own interests, but to those pertaining to the service of the Bridegroom.” The saint says: “Even its communion with God Himself is nothing else but acts of love.” The soul declares: “My soul is occupied, and all my substance in His service.” In these words it reveals the gift it has made of itself to the Beloved in this union of love in which the soul is, with all its powers (intellect, will, and memory), dedicated and engaged in His service, devoting its intellect to the understanding of what is of most consequence to His cause that it may put it into practice; its will to the preference of all that gives pleasure to God, to the direction of its affections in everything to God; its memory to the seeking of what may serve Him and give Him the greatest pleasure.

The soul continues: “And all my substance in His service.” By all its substance, the soul means here all that relates to its sensible part. The soul says here that it has consecrated its sensible as well as its rational and spiritual part to His service.

All this, it says, is consecrated to His cause: the soul orders the body according to God “in all its interior and exterior

senses, all the acts of which are directed to God. The four passions of the soul are also under control in Him; for the soul's joy, hope, fear, and grief are conversant with God only; all its appetites and all its anxieties also are directed unto Him only."

"The whole substance of the soul is now so occupied with God, so intent upon Him, that its very first movements, even inadvertently, have God for their object and their end. The understanding, memory, and will tend directly to God."

"Now I guard no flock." By these words the soul means: "I do not now go after my likings and desires; for having them fixed upon God, I no longer feed or guard them. The soul not only does not guard them now, but has no other occupation than to wait upon God. 'Nor have I any other employment.' Before the soul succeeded in effecting this gift and surrender of itself, and of all that belongs to it, to the Beloved, it was entangled in many unprofitable occupations.... It may be said that its occupations of this kind were as many as its habits of imperfection."

The soul still has a blemish, which it never rids itself of as long as it does not once and for all consecrate all its substance to the service of God so that, as we have said, all its words, thoughts, and works are directed to God.

"My sole occupation is love.' The soul means: 'All my occupation now is the practice of the love of God, all the powers of soul and body, memory, understanding, and will, interior and exterior senses, the desires of spirit and of sense, all work in and by love. All I do is done in love; all I suffer, I suffer in the sweetness of love.'"...

"When the soul has arrived at this state all the acts of its spiritual and sensual nature, whether active or passive, and of whatever kind they may be, always occasion an increase of love and delight in God; even the act of prayer and communion with God, which was formerly carried on by reflections and divers other methods, is now wholly an act of love.... The soul, in the state of spiritual betrothal, is for the most part living in the union of love—that is, the will is habitually waiting lovingly on God."

It is impossible to conceive of such perfection of love, of such a gift of self extending even to the first movements of all the powers, in the purely ascetical way. According to St. John of the Cross, this perfection, obtained only in the spiritual espousals, is the effect of the mystical graces bestowed in this state.²⁵⁵⁸ Thus once more the state of perfect love is identified in the teaching of St. John of the Cross with the state of the spiritual espousals.

St. 29. The Soul Lost to the World for Its Beloved

This stanza also refers to the state of the spiritual espousals: "Having attained to a living love of God [that is, practicing the virtues solely for love of God], it makes little account of all this; and that is not all. It boasts that... it is lost to the world and to itself for the Beloved.... Such is he that loves God; he seeks neither gain nor reward but only to lose all, even himself, according to God's will; this is what such a one counts gain."

This is still another description of perfect love; it is the way of pure faith and pure love, as the following words show: "When a soul has advanced so far on the spiritual road as to be lost to all the natural methods of communing with God; when it seeks Him no longer by meditation, images, impressions, nor by any other created ways, or representations of sense, but only by rising above them all, in the joyful communion with Him by faith and love, then it may be said to have found God of a truth, because it has truly lost itself as to all that is not God, and also as to its own self."

IV. THE PERFECTION OF LOVE IN THE SPIRITUAL MARRIAGE

St. 12. The Spiritual Marriage and the Transforming Union

In this stanza St. John himself declares that he is discussing the spiritual marriage. First of all, he tells us that the perfection of this state is not obtained by our own efforts, but by the breathing of the Holy Ghost: that is, it belongs, not to the ascetical, but to the mystical way. The soul has again implored and obtained the breathing of the Holy Ghost which remains the indispensable means and instrument of the perfection of this state.

St. John then describes the spiritual marriage as the state of perfect love. It is a complete transformation into the Beloved: God and the soul give each other total possession of each other by the union of love consummated in the measure possible on earth. The soul as a result becomes divine and God by participation, as much as this life permits. By the consummation of the spiritual marriage between God and the soul, two natures are in one single spirit and love of God. The spouse is introduced, that is, she has got rid of all that is temporal, all that is natural, of all attachments, ways, and spiritual manners... in the transformation of this sublime embrace.... The soul is transformed in its God. The transformation is complete. What St. Paul says to the Galatians may be applied to it: "I live, now not I, but Christ liveth in me."²⁵⁵⁹

Thus the spiritual marriage is for St. John of the Cross the union of perfect love. But perfect love is in the normal way; all are called to perfect love, the final end of life on earth: "Now the end of the commandment is charity."²⁵⁶⁰ Besides, St. John of the Cross affirms it: "In all the works of the soul, God and the soul have only one ambition, one end: the consummation and plenitude of this state." If, therefore, the state of spiritual marriage is the end of all the actions of the soul, as well as of the divine operation, it is necessarily identified with perfect love and cannot be in purely accidental relation to it. Consequently we conclude that it incontestably brings the spiritual marriage, an eminently mystical state, into the normal way of sanctity. The

analysis of the following stanzas will but strengthen this conclusion.

St. 20–21. The Spiritual Marriage and the Total Death of the Passions

In this stanza St. John describes the spiritual marriage as the state of perfect love in which God “commands all vain distractions of the fancy and imagination from henceforth to cease, and controls the irascible and concupiscible faculties which were hitherto the sources of so much affliction. He brings, so far as it is possible in this life, the three powers of memory, understanding, and will to the perfection of their objects.... He adjures also all these actions which depart from the true mean, and bids them cease before the soft lyres and the siren strains, which so effectually charm the powers of the soul as to occupy them completely in their true and proper functions, so that they avoid not only all extremes, but also the slightest tendency to them.”

This is a new degree of love which manifestly surpasses our own efforts and the purely ascetical life. Moreover, St. John of the Cross says so explicitly: “The Beloved adjures the affections of these four passions, compels them to cease and to be at rest.”

St. 18. The Perfect Calm of the Powers and Senses

The spiritual marriage is represented here as the state of perfection which excludes even the imperfection of the inordinate first movements of the powers and senses. “And touch not our thresholds, that is to say: Let not even your first movements touch the higher part, for the first movements of the soul are the entrance and thresholds of it. When the first movements have passed into the reason, they have crossed the threshold; but when they remain as first movements only, they are then said merely to touch the threshold, or to cry at the gate, which is the case when reason and sense contend over an unreasonable act.”

Thus, in this state, this sensible part with all its powers, its energies, and its weaknesses has yielded to the spirit. This constitutes even now a blessed life, similar to that of the state of innocence, when all the resources and capacities of the sensible part of man enabled him to know and to love God.

St. 35. The Solitude of the Soul with the Bridegroom

In this stanza St. John shows clearly that the spiritual marriage is a mystical state and that perfect love is not obtained in the ascetical way, but that it is God who produces it in the soul in the mystical way. In this stanza the Bridegroom declares not only that He guides the soul, “but that He is its only guide, without any intermediate help.”

“‘Alone hath the Beloved guided her.’ That is, the Beloved not only guides the soul in its solitude, but it is He alone who works in it directly and immediately. It is of the nature of the soul’s union with God in the spiritual marriage that God works directly, and communicates Himself immediately, not by the ministry of angels or by the help of natural capacities. For the exterior and interior senses, all created things, and even the soul itself, contribute very little toward the reception of those great supernatural favors which God bestows in this state; yea, rather, inasmuch as they do not fall within the cognizance of natural efforts, ability, and application, God effects them alone.

“The reason is that He finds the soul alone in its solitude, and therefore will not give it another companion, nor will He entrust His work to any other than Himself. There is a certain fitness in this; for the soul having abandoned all things, and passed through all the ordinary means, rising above them unto God, God Himself becomes the guide and the way to Himself. The soul in solitude, detached from all things, having now ascended above all things, nothing now can profit or help it to ascend higher except the Bridegroom Word Himself.”

In this stanza St. John admirably distinguishes between the ascetical and the mystical ways. To the ascetical way belongs the preparation of the soul for the divine operation by denuding it of all that is created; to the mystical, consummate perfection, which God produces in the soul.

St. 37–38. Perfect Purity and Equality of Love

St. John of the Cross shows first in this stanza that the soul desires mystical contemplation, designated here by “the caverns of the rock,” because mystical contemplation is the means to obtain perfect love and perfect purity. In the following stanza he describes perfection and the purity of the state of the spiritual marriage. “The reason why the soul longed to enter the caverns was that it might attain to the consummation of the love of God, the object of its continual desires; that is, that it might love God with the pureness and perfection wherewith He has loved it, so that it might thereby requite His love.”

If the connection between perfect love and the mystical contemplation designated by the “caverns of the rock” were purely accidental, if perfect love and perfect purity could be obtained without mystical contemplation, this desire of the soul would be imperfect, according to the principles of St. John of the Cross.

He continues: “In the present stanza the bride says to the Bridegroom that He will there show her what she had always aimed at in all her actions, namely, that He would show her how to love Him perfectly, as He has loved her. And, secondly, that He will give her that essential glory for which He has predestined her from the day of His eternity.

‘There Thou wilt show me... That which my soul desired.’

“That which the soul aims at is equality in love with God, the object of its natural and supernatural desire. He who loves cannot be satisfied if he does not feel that he loves as much as he is loved.”

The desire for equality of love is, therefore, essential to love; it is in the nature and the grace of love. The saint continues: “When the soul sees that in the transformation in God, such as is possible in this life, notwithstanding the immensity of its love, it cannot equal the perfection of that love wherewith God loves it, it desires the clear transformation of glory wherein it shall equal the perfection of love wherewith it is itself beloved of God; it desires... the clear transformation of glory wherein it shall equal His love....

“The will of the soul will then be the will of God.... Though in heaven the will of the soul is not destroyed, it is so intimately united with the power of the will of God, who loves it, that it loves Him as strongly and as perfectly as it is loved of Him; both wills being united in one sole will and one sole love of God. Thus the soul loves God with the will and strength of God Himself, being made one with that very strength of love wherewith itself is loved of God. This strength is of the Holy Ghost, in whom the soul is there transformed. He is given to the soul to strengthen its love; ministering to it, and supplying in it, because of its transformation in glory, that which is defective in it. In the perfect transformation also of the state of spiritual marriage, such as is possible on earth, in which the soul is all clothed in grace, the soul loves in a certain way in the Holy Ghost, who is given to it in that transformation.”

Again St. John identifies the state of the spiritual marriage with the state of perfect love, of perfect conformity to the will of God; it is the normal end of all life on earth. He then explains the purity of this state, saying that it presupposes evidently that God has given to the soul in this state of transformation a great purity, like to that of original justice or that of baptismal innocence.²⁵⁶¹ The soul here adds, therefore, that this purity is going to be granted to it by the Spouse as the fruit of this transformation of love. It says also:

“And there Thou wilt give me at once,
O Thou, my life,
That which Thou gavest me the other day.”

“By ‘other day’ is meant the day of the eternity of God, which is other than the day of time. In that day of eternity God predestined the soul unto glory, and determined the degree of glory which He would give it and freely gave from the beginning before He created it.”

The soul declares in these verses that it will find this gift again in this union of love. That is indeed what it meant in the last verse by the words “that which Thou gavest me the other day,” since, as we have said, the soul, in its state of perfection, attains to the same purity and the same cleanness.

St. John therefore affirms here that in the spiritual marriage the soul reaches a purity similar to that of original justice or of baptismal innocence. This is an important statement. From this affirmation we may draw two conclusions which interest us: (1) the spiritual marriage is normal; (2) it is mystical.

It is normal, for the purity of original justice or of baptismal innocence, which the soul receives in the spiritual marriage, excludes every moral imperfection; and this exclusion is the normal end to which all souls can and must tend. This state is mystical, for in the present order a permanent state, similar to that of original or baptismal innocence, without moral imperfection, in the full activity of the spiritual faculties, cannot be attained in the purely ascetical way by our own efforts, but only in the mystical way by the special operation of the Holy Ghost. It requires the grace of infused contemplation and the activity of the gifts of the Holy Ghost, as is evident from all the texts from the works of St. John of the Cross. In this state the soul “experiences interiorly a sort of fruition, a sweetness which makes it overflow with praise.” The purity to which it has attained is “bestowed on it by the Bridegroom as the fruit of this transformation of love.” The touches of the passive graces are evident in this state. Is not this also a normal growth of perfect love?

St. 39. The Flame of Sweet Transformation

The spiritual marriage is described in this stanza as the state of the most sublime perfection and transformation in God. St. John bases his teaching on the words of St. Paul: “And because you are sons, God hath sent the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying: Abba (Father)”;²⁵⁶² on the words of our Lord: “Father, I will that where I am, they also whom Thou hast given Me may be with Me; that they may see My glory which Thou hast given Me”;²⁵⁶³ and on the words of St. Peter: “He hath given us most great and precious promises, that by these you may be made partakers of the divine nature.”²⁵⁶⁴ All these quotations admirably confirm our thesis that in the opinion of St. John of the Cross the spiritual marriage is the full and normal development, the flowering of the life of grace, the normal end of supernatural life on earth.

St. John of the Cross also teaches in this stanza that perfect love is obtained in the mystical way by the “breathing of the air,” that is, by the operation of the Holy Ghost, and that it is accompanied by mystical contemplation, which is not only the means,²⁵⁶⁵ but also the effect of perfect love.²⁵⁶⁶

The spouse, we said, wishes two things in the preceding stanza: first, what her soul had as an end; then, what the Bridegroom had given her the other day. The soul sets forth in the present stanza the parts of its end: that is, not only perfect love, but also all that comes to the soul through it.

Therefore the soul enumerates five things which detail all that it admits having in view here: first the breathing of the air; then the love of which we have spoken, the principal object that it has in view;... fourthly, the pure and clear contemplation of the divine essence.

“The breathing of the air.” This is a property of the Holy Ghost which the soul asks for here in order to love God perfectly. It calls it the “breathing of the air” because it is a touch or a very delicate feeling of love, ordinarily produced in the soul in this state by the presence of the Holy Ghost.

Thus, according to St. John of the Cross, to love God perfectly the “breathing of the air,” or the touch of the Holy Ghost, is necessary; this is certainly a mystical grace ordinarily produced in the spiritual marriage.²⁵⁶⁷

The fourth request is “‘In the serene night.’ That is, contemplation, in which the soul desires to behold the grove. It is called night because contemplation is dim; and that is the reason why it is also called mystical theology, that is, the secret or hidden wisdom of God, where, without the sound of words, or the intervention of any bodily or spiritual sense, as it were in silence and in repose, in the darkness of sense and nature, God teaches the soul—and the soul knows not how—in a most secret and hidden way....

“Some spiritual writers call this ‘understanding without understanding,’ because it does not take place in what philosophers call the active understanding, which is conversant with the forms, fancies, and apprehensions of the physical faculties, but in the understanding as it is possible and passive, which without receiving such forms, receives passively only the substantial knowledge of them free from all imagery. This occurs without effort or exertion on its part, and for this reason contemplation is called night.

“Still, however clear may be its knowledge, it is dark night in comparison with that of the blessed, for which the soul prays. Hence, while it prays for clear contemplation, that is, the fruition of the grove, and its beauty with the other objects here enumerated, it says, let it be in the night now serene; that is, in the clear beatific contemplation.”

This magnificent description of mystical contemplation proves conclusively to us that the spiritual marriage is a mystical state. But this mystical contemplation, according to the terms of St. John of the Cross, is “that which comes to the soul through perfect love.” It is, therefore, not purely accidental, but is the essential effect, the distinctive characteristic, of perfect love, as it was also, we have seen, the means, the disposition to obtain this love.²⁵⁶⁸ But if mystical contemplation is the characteristic of perfect love and its necessary disposition, it is surely in the normal way, as perfect love itself is.

St. 40. The Final Preparations of the Soul

In the last stanza, St. John of the Cross describes the perfection of the virtues in the spiritual marriage and the perfect harmony in this state between the lower and the higher parts of man.

In this stanza the soul wishes to make it known that it is ready to receive the favors to be enjoyed in this state, gifts which it has asked of the Bridegroom and which, if the soul is not ready, it can neither receive nor preserve. Therefore the soul puts before the Beloved four dispositions or preparations which made possible what precedes, in order to urge Him still more to grant it the favors mentioned: “The first is that the soul is detached from all things and a stranger to them. The second is that the devil is overcome and put to flight. The third is that the passions are subdued and the natural desires mortified. The fourth... that the sensual and lower nature of the soul is changed and purified, and so conformed to the spiritual, as not only not to hinder spiritual blessings, but is, on the contrary, prepared for them....”

“None saw it.’ That is, my soul is so detached, so denuded, so lonely, so estranged from all created things, in heaven and earth; it has become so recollected in Thee, that nothing whatever can come within sight of that most intimate joy which I have in Thee. That is, there is nothing whatever that can cause me pleasure with its sweetness, or disgust with its vileness; for my soul is so far removed from all such things,... that nothing can behold me.

“This is not all, for: ‘Neither did Aminadab appear.’ Aminadab, in the Holy Writings, signified the devil; that is, the enemy of the soul, in a spiritual sense, who is ever fighting against it, and disturbing it with his innumerable artillery, that it may not enter into the fortress and secret place of interior recollection with the Bridegroom. There the soul is so protected, so strong, so triumphant in virtue which it then practices, so defended by God’s right hand, that the devil not only dares not approach it, but runs away from it in great fear, and does not venture to appear. The practice of virtue, and the state of perfection to which the soul has come, is a victory over Satan, and causes him such terror that he cannot present himself before it. Thus Aminadab appeared not with any right to keep the soul away from the object of its desire.

“‘The siege was intermitted.’ By the siege is meant the passions and desires, which, when not overcome and mortified, surround the soul and fight it on all sides. Hence the term ‘siege’ is applied to them. This siege is ‘intermitted,’ that is, the passions are subject to reason, and the desires are mortified.... Under these circumstances the soul entreats the Beloved to communicate to it those graces for which it has prayed, for now the siege is no hindrance. Until the four passions of the soul are ordered in reason according to God, and until the desires are mortified and purified, the soul is incapable of seeing God.”

The soul says that in this state the cavalry dismount at the sight of the spiritual waters, because the sensible part of the soul is now so well purified, and in a certain way spiritualized. “So the soul with its powers of sense and natural forces becomes so

recollected as to participate and rejoice to some degree in the spiritual grandeurs which God communicates to it in the spirit within.”

Here again St. John of the Cross shows us that the spiritual marriage is the state of consummate perfection, the normal end of the present life, which can, however, be attained only in the mystical way, “in the fortress or the hiding place of interior recollection in the company of the Beloved.”

Rich in suggestion is the conclusion by which St. John ends his work: “Whereunto [the spiritual marriage] may He bring of His mercy all those who call upon the most sweet name of Jesus, the Bridegroom of faithful souls, to whom be all honor and glory, together with the Father and the Holy Ghost. Amen.” In these words the Mystical Doctor wishes for the grace to be introduced into the interior recollection which he has just described, that is, into the state of the spiritual marriage; and he wishes it for all those “who call upon the most sweet name of Jesus,” that is, for all the faithful. Now, one does not wish for all the faithful an extraordinary grace, outside the normal way, especially if the one who wishes it is St. John of the Cross.

We shall append two texts from *The Ascent of Mount Carmel*, in which the holy doctor explicitly teaches that obscure contemplation (which is without any doubt mystical contemplation) is part of perfect union with God, and consequently is in the normal way, and that absolute renunciation in regard to all other types of knowledge does not apply to this contemplation, since it belongs to the union of love, the normal end of our life on earth.

St. John makes the following statement: “The second kind [of knowledge], which is obscure and general, has but one form, that of contemplation, which is the work of faith. The soul is to be led into this by directing it thereto through all the rest, beginning with the first and detaching it from them.”²⁵⁶⁹

Farther on he says: “This divine knowledge concerning God never relates to particular things, because it is conversant with the highest, and therefore cannot be explained unless when it is extended to some truth less than God, which is capable of being described; but this general knowledge is ineffable. It is only a soul in union with God that is capable of this profound loving knowledge, for it is itself that union. This knowledge consists in a certain contact of the soul with the Divinity, and it is God Himself who is then felt and tasted.”²⁵⁷⁰ Nothing could be more clear and explicit.

From a study of all the texts that we have quoted (and they could be multiplied), it seems we may conclude that, in the opinion of St. John of the Cross, the state of the espousals and of the spiritual marriage is identified with the state of perfect love. It is, therefore, in the normal way; it is the normal end of our life on earth.²⁵⁷¹

To conclude and to clarify everything, we must, it seems, avoid two confusions:

1. What is essential to mystical contemplation must not be confused with what is accidental and accessory in it. The essence of mystical contemplation is the infused, obscure, general contemplation which St. John of the Cross speaks of in *The Ascent of Mount Carmel*²⁵⁷² and in *A Spiritual Canticle*.²⁵⁷³ This contemplation is produced by the gifts of the Holy Ghost, by the gifts of wisdom and understanding. The other types of supernatural knowledge, particular and distinct like visions, revelations, locutions, and so on, as well as ecstasies and other exterior phenomena, are only something accidental in comparison with mystical contemplation, properly so called; they are, more properly speaking, *gratiae gratis datae*²⁵⁷⁴ which the soul ought not at all to desire.

2. Sanctity should not be confused with the salvation of the soul. We do not affirm that mystical contemplation in this life is necessary for the salvation of the soul, but the question is whether it is not necessary for sanctity. By sanctity we mean a very great perfection of the love of God and of neighbor, a perfection which, nevertheless, always remains in the normal way, for the precept of love has no limits.²⁵⁷⁵

To state the matter with greater precision, the sanctity in question here is the normal immediate prelude of the life of heaven, a prelude which is realized either on earth or in purgatory, and which presupposes that the soul is fully purified, capable of receiving the beatific vision immediately. Finally, when we say that, according to St. John of the Cross, infused contemplation is necessary for sanctity, we mean a moral necessity, in other words, that in the majority of cases sanctity will not be attained without it. And we even add that without it the soul will not actually have the full perfection of the Christian life, which implies the eminent exercise of the theological virtues and of the gifts of the Holy Ghost which accompany them.

NOTE

To this very remarkable article which Father Alexander Rozwadowski, S.J., wrote in 1936, we shall add a simple remark: Father Gabriel of St. Magdalen, CD., has since that date drawn much nearer to this point of view. In fact, in an article in the *Angelicum*,²⁵⁷⁶ after describing the transforming union and quoting the moving call of St. John of the Cross to negligent souls, created, nevertheless, for such grandeurs,²⁵⁷⁷ he wrote: “This call, addressed by the saint to souls in general, shows us that he cannot consider ‘extraordinary’ the sublime things that he has just described for us. Not everyone is invited to graces which are

privileges. The object of the sacerdotal prayer of Christ, made for ‘all those who should believe in Him,’ cannot, in its turn, be a ‘reserved’ good; and that which constitutes the flowering of the seed of supernatural life in our souls, which sanctifying grace is, must be prepared for all those who are endowed with grace.” Likewise in regard to the desire for equality of love, he writes: “There is, therefore, in our charity for God an aspiration connatural to mystical love; such love is in no way ‘extraordinary’ for a soul endowed with the virtue of charity, but brings this virtue to its ultimate and integral perfection.”

Lastly, infused contemplation, without which mystical love does not exist, is not extraordinary either, as Father Gabriel recognizes: “For St. John of the Cross, the ‘illumination’ of faith is the work of the gifts of the Holy Ghost. He has, moreover, strongly affirmed ‘that faith leads the soul to union.’²⁵⁷⁸ He could not uphold such a thesis if it were necessary to add other ‘extraordinary’ principles to faith.”.. ‘. We may therefore conclude, Father Gabriel says at the end of his article, that neither does the light necessary for the transformation of love belong to the order of reserved privileges. It is a “connatural” light: the light of faith accompanied by that of the gifts. Faith and the gifts are elements of our supernatural “organism.”... Unfortunately the soul often recoils before the indispensable suffering which should prepare union. Let us not forget that “the door by which we enter into the riches of the knowledge of God is the cross.”²⁵⁷⁹

Father Arintero, O.P., taught this same doctrine from 1908 on in *Evolucion mistica*,²⁵⁸⁰ and we have not ceased to teach it since the first edition (1923) of *Christian Perfection and Contemplation*, in which we declared: “What constitutes the foundation of this eminent state, called the transforming union, is in no way miraculous.”²⁵⁸¹ And again: “All just souls are called, at least in a general and remote manner, to this transforming union, which is the normal prelude to the life of heaven. If they are faithful to this call, and at the same time humble and generous, they will hear a more proximate and urgent invitation.”²⁵⁸² St. Teresa repeats this in the Epilogue to *The Interior Castle*. ”²⁵⁸³

The same conclusion is more or less explicitly reached by several authors who have treated of very close union with Mary in the unitive way, according to the principles set forth by St. Grignon de Montfort.²⁵⁸⁴ Father E. Neubert, S.M., has assembled some very significant data on this point.²⁵⁸⁵ On this subject must also be mentioned *L’ Union mystique a Marie*, written by Mary of St. Teresa (1623–77), a Flemish recluse who experienced it personally.²⁵⁸⁶

TOWARD A CLOSE UNION, ALMOST ALWAYS AN ACTUALITY THE VALUE OF THE HIDDEN LIFE

The life of union seems to us expressed with simplicity and depth in the following letter from a contemplative religious who is still young and who has, we believe, truly found his vocation, in spite of the powerlessness of which he speaks:

Peace increases with joy, although everything sensible disappears more and more, and my poor soul is as if lost at times in the darkness, possessing nothing and unable to acquire anything by its own powers. Life becomes so simple. A single desire governs everything: to arrive at Love, to thank Him for His incomprehensible love, and to save souls. My desire for the infinity of God grows continually, and the clear view of my own nothingness is ever before my eyes. Though it humiliates me greatly, it does not discourage me. I try to live simply as at Nazareth, making each act, even the most banal, an act of perfect love. For is it not with our will that we love? What matter then if a man is truly a wretched nothing? Is not the sole, strong, and constant determination to give pleasure to Jesus and to my heavenly Mother by each act, love which grows more perfect with the intensity of the will? Every morning and repeatedly during my work or in the recitation of the Divine Office, I say to Jesus: Beloved Jesus, I wish each thought, each word, each little action to be an act of perfect love, and to each one of them I unite the infinite merits of Calvary, the immense merits of my Mother and of all the angels and the saints. This intention becomes more and more actual and is continually on my lips.

All (my powerlessness to understand His limitless love, my actual desire of love, my prayer for my friends, for souls), all is more and more summed up in this single word: Jesus. I think always of Him, but I do not possess Him sufficiently.

If I am mistaken in what I have just said, Father, correct me.

Oh, I see indeed that I am very wretched. All the sins and all the selfishness of my past life are ever before my eyes. I know that I have been very ungrateful. But precisely for that reason, I do not wish to lose a minute that is not an act of love. I should like my love to be as pure as possible in order that my poor life may be useful to the Church, to souls. In your letter you told me that I am not losing my life. What joy!

On the other hand, I see that I am so terribly poor. The world can offer me nothing; everything in it is vanity. This I see. The supernatural, the divine, which alone I seek, which alone can help me toward union with Jesus, I do not possess; at least I do not feel that I possess it.

My faculties no longer seem to belong to me; my thoughts do not come at will. The thought of Jesus, yes; but no others. I am convinced that I shall never be able to advance unless help comes to me from on high. Will it come? When? I wish to be patient, tranquil. May His holy will be done, and may I oppose no obstacle to it!

You know that in recent years, I have had to admit to my superiors and to everybody, that I was good for nothing, that I could no longer preach or teach. My memory retains nothing,²⁵⁸⁷ Thanks be to God, I am no longer concerned about men’s opinion. I work for Jesus. Since my arrival here, I take my turn with the others for the sermons. Moreover, there are no great preachers here, and the people are simple. I also sometimes preach to our Carmelite sisters. Everybody claims to be satisfied, but these sermons are, more properly speaking, little talks in which everything is very simple and the language not elegant. I have nothing by heart; but I bring several great thoughts on a scrap of paper and try to talk about them. I know that grace alone can change hearts, and that is why I wish to be increasingly united to my divine Friend. A final reason why I wish that my poor life should be as holy as possible is the good of the Province....

The conviction that there is only one thing to do, to render myself increasingly like the great friends of Jesus, in order to do good to the Church and to save souls, grows continually. Besides, my holy Order exacts perfection from me; it is not sufficient to be “a good religious”; one should be closely united to God. But that is precisely what constitutes my constant torment. The thought of the unbounded love of Jesus for us is always present to my thought. What can I do in return to please Him and to save souls? It is my first thought in the morning, it returns repeatedly in the course of the day, and it is my last thought at night.

We have so far discussed the three ages of the interior life, considering them not under a diminished form, but as they are described by the great spiritual writers, in particular St. John of the Cross. In the course of our work we have thus spoken of the infused contemplation of the mysteries of faith and of its degrees, though we did not treat of the extraordinary graces which at times accompany it, but are quite distinct from it. We shall now discuss these graces.

To proceed in an orderly fashion, we shall see first what St. Paul tells us about these graces, which he calls charisms, and how St. Thomas Aquinas explains his teaching. Next, we shall treat of private revelations, visions, interior words, divine touches, stigmatization, and suggestion. We shall sum up the classic teaching on these subjects and thus find a new confirmation of the traditional doctrine set forth earlier in this work on the axis of the spiritual life. The examination of extraordinary facts brings out more clearly what distinguishes them from what is loftiest in the normal way of sanctity.^{[2588](#)}

PART 5

Extraordinary Graces

Charisms or Graces Gratis Datae

St. Paul speaks of these extraordinary graces in his First Epistle to the Corinthians where he says: “Now there are diversities of graces, but the same Spirit.... And the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man unto profit. To one indeed, by the Spirit, is given the *word of wisdom*; and to another, *the word of knowledge*, according to the same Spirit; to another, *faith*²⁵⁸⁹ in the same Spirit; to another, *the grace of healing* in one Spirit; to another, *the working of miracles*; to another, *prophecy*; to another, *the discerning of spirits*; to another, *diverse kinds of tongues*; to another, *interpretation of speeches*. But all these things one and the same Spirit worketh, dividing to everyone according as He will.”²⁵⁹⁰

St. Paul places charity far above all these gifts or charisms: “If.. I have not charity, I am nothing,”²⁵⁹¹ for my will is turned in the opposite direction from the divine will.

NATURE AND DIVISION OF THE CHARISMS

As St. Thomas shows,²⁵⁹² sanctifying grace and charity are much more excellent than these charisms; the former unite us immediately to God, our last end, whereas these exceptional gifts are directed chiefly to the benefit of our neighbor and only prepare him to be converted, without giving him divine life. As a rule, they are not essentially supernatural like sanctifying grace, but only preternatural like a miracle and prophecy. They are only signs which confirm the divine revelation proposed to all, or the sanctity of great servants of God.

There is an immense difference between the essentially supernatural character of sanctifying grace and the supernaturalness of these charisms. Grace is essentially supernatural as a participation in the intimate life of God; it is consequently invisible and not naturally knowable. Whereas these naturally knowable signs are not supernatural by their essence, but only by the mode of their production: thus the resurrection of a dead body restores natural life (vegetative and sensitive) in a supernatural manner, but does not produce supernatural life, the participation in the divine life. What is supernatural in these signs is, therefore, exterior and very inferior to that of the grace received in baptism.

The nature of these charisms may be more clearly seen in the division that St. Thomas²⁵⁹³ gives of them, following the text of St. Paul, which we quoted before.

Graces gratis
datae to instruct
one's neighbor
concerning divine
things.

- | | |
|---|--|
| 1. Graces that give full knowledge of divine things | - faith or special certitude as to principles.
- word of wisdom , on the principal conclusions known through the first cause.
- word of knowledge , on the examples and effects which manifest the causes |
| 2. Graces that confirm divine revelation | -by works: gift of healing, gift of miracles.
-by knowledge: discerning of spirits, prophecy. |
| 3. Graces that aid in preaching the word of God | - gift of tongues;
- gift of interpretation of speeches. |

It is easy to see that St. Paul and St. John the Evangelist excelled in the word of wisdom; St. Matthew and St. James in the word of knowledge; that certain saints, such as St. Vincent Ferrer, received the gift of miracles in a striking manner; others, such as St. John Bosco, that of prophecy; still others, like the holy Cure of Ars, the discerning of spirits.

APPLICATION OF THIS DOCTRINE BY ST. JOHN OF THE CROSS

To these charisms are generally linked the extraordinary favors which sometimes accompany infused contemplation, that is, private revelations, supernatural words, visions. St. John of the Cross treats these favors at length in *The Ascent of Mount Carmel*,²⁵⁹⁴ distinguishing them with great care from infused contemplation, which belongs to the grace of the virtues and gifts, or sanctifying grace, as we saw earlier in this work.

The teaching of St. John of the Cross on this point rests theologically on the tract on prophecy expounded by St. Thomas Aquinas in the *Summa theologiae*.²⁵⁹⁵ In question 175 St. Thomas devotes six articles²⁵⁹⁶ to rapture which sometimes accompanies prophetic revelation, as it may also accompany infused contemplation.

St. Thomas there explains in particular that prophetic revelation may be made in three ways: by a sensible vision, an imaginary vision, or an intellectual vision; and the prophet may be awake, asleep, or in ecstasy.

The vision is said to be sensible or corporeal when a sensible and exterior sign appears to the eyes or when an exterior voice is heard.²⁵⁹⁷ The vision is called imaginary when God, in order to express His thought to us, coordinates certain images that pre-exist in our imagination, or imprints new ones on it.²⁵⁹⁸ There is a supernatural intellectual vision when He acts immediately on the intellect by coordinating our acquired ideas or by imprinting new ideas, called infused.²⁵⁹⁹ There is always infused prophetic light to judge supernaturally of what is proposed, and indeed this light alone suffices to interpret certain signs, as Joseph interpreted the dreams of Pharaoh.²⁶⁰⁰

If the prophet is awake, the vision is more perfect than if given to him during sleep, because he has the full use of his faculties.²⁶⁰¹ Occasionally the so-called imaginary vision and the intellectual vision are accompanied by ecstasy, or alienation of the senses.²⁶⁰² Ecstasy, especially when it is only partial (the alienation of one sense and not of all), may be a natural effect of the absorption of the higher faculties in the object manifested; the soul can no longer be attentive to exterior things.²⁶⁰³ But when ecstasy, instead of following, so to speak, precedes the vision or infused contemplation and prepares the soul for it, then ecstasy is extraordinary and deserves the name of rapture; it then implies a certain violence which lifts the soul above inferior things in order to fix it in God.²⁶⁰⁴

Christ and the Blessed Virgin had all these charisms in an eminent degree, but without losing the use of their senses. It is said of St. Gertrude that she never knew the weakness of ecstasy; of our Savior and His holy Mother it must be said that from the very beginning of their lives they were superior to ecstasy and rapture.²⁶⁰⁵

Following these principles accepted by theologians, St. John of the Cross draws a clear distinction between general and obscure infused contemplation²⁶⁰⁶ and different modes of particular and distinct supernatural knowledge: (1) visions, sensible,

imaginary, or intellectual;^{[2607](#)}. (2) revelations;^{[2608](#)}. (3) interior words.^{[2609](#)} After enumerating these modes of knowledge, St. John of the Cross adds: “In regard to obscure and general knowledge, there is no division; it is contemplation received in faith. This contemplation is the end to which we should lead the soul; all other knowledge should be directed toward this, beginning with the first; and the soul should progress by detaching itself from all of them.”^{[2610](#)}

Following the example of St. Thomas,^{[2611](#)} we shall proceed from the general to the particular, and we shall first discuss revelations; then we shall see the special modes of their manifestation, that is, either by visions, or by words, a mode which is generally more expressive.

Moreover, we shall consider first among these favors those that are more exterior, that are manifestly directed toward the benefit of our neighbor and are more directly connected with charisms or graces *gratis datae*. Next, we shall consider those which are more directly ordained to the sanctification of the person who receives them. This is particularly the case with various interior locutions and also with divine touches received in the will, which St. John of the Cross discusses last.^{[2612](#)}

Proceeding in this manner from the general to the particular, from the exterior to the interior, we shall avoid repetition and more dearly understand the divine action in souls. We shall see that extraordinary favors, like the stigmata, are exceptional signs given by God from time to time to draw us from our spiritual somnolence and to attract our attention more strongly to the great mysteries of faith by which we should live more profoundly every day, in particular to the mystery of the redemptive Incarnation.^{[2613](#)}

Divine Revelations and Visions

Divine revelations manifest supernaturally a hidden truth by means of a vision, a word, or only a prophetic instinct; they presuppose the gift of prophecy. They are called public if they have been made by the prophets, Christ, or the apostles, and are proposed to all by the Church, which preserves them in Scripture and tradition. They are called private when they are directed only to the particular benefit of certain persons. Private revelations, no matter what their importance, do not belong to the deposit of Catholic faith. However, some may draw attention to a certain form of worship of a nature to interest all the faithful, for example, the devotion to the Sacred Heart. After examining the reasons which motivate this worship, the Church may promote it and establish it without judging infallibly about the divine origin of the private revelation which gave rise to this movement of prayer. These private revelations will remain the object of pious belief, as will the supernatural origin of exceptional favors which occasionally accompany them, such as the stigmata of a particular servant of God.²⁶¹⁴

WHAT SHOULD BE THOUGHT OF PRIVATE REVELATIONS

Those who receive divine revelations, recognized as such, should most certainly, after prudent and authoritative judgment, incline respectfully before this supernatural manifestation.²⁶¹⁵ St. Margaret Mary followed this rule in regard to devotion to the Sacred Heart; so also did St. Bernadette in respect to the revelations she received at Lourdes, after favorable examination by diocesan authority.

According to certain theologians, a person who receives a private divine revelation with the certitude of its divine origin, like St. Joan of Arc, should believe in it with divine theological faith, for, in their opinion, the revelation contains the formal motive of infused faith, the authority of God revealing.²⁶¹⁶

According to other theologians, and their opinion seems more exact, anyone who receives a certain private revelation should adhere to it immediately, not through divine faith but by prophetic light. This supernatural certitude may last or, on the contrary, give way to a moral certitude when the prophetic illumination disappears; but this illumination may return in order to restore the first certitude.²⁶¹⁷

When the Church approves private revelations made to the saints, she simply declares that they contain nothing contrary to Scripture and to Catholic teaching and that they may be proposed as probable to the pious belief of the faithful.²⁶¹⁸ Private revelations may not be published without the approbation of ecclesiastical authority.²⁶¹⁹

Even in revelations approved as probable by the Church, some error may slip in; for the saints themselves may attribute to the Holy Ghost what proceeds from themselves, or may falsely interpret the meaning of a divine revelation, or interpret it in too materialistic a manner, as, for example, the disciples interpreted Christ's remark about St. John to mean that the latter would not die.²⁶²⁰

The explanation of this possibility of error lies in the fact that there are many degrees in prophetic light, from the simple, supernatural instinct to perfect revelation. When there is only prophetic instinct, the meaning of things revealed and even the divine origin of the revelation may remain unknown.²⁶²¹ Thus it was that Caiphas prophesied, without being aware of it, when he said, "that it was expedient that one man should die for the people."²⁶²²

One of the signs of the divine origin of a revelation is the humility and simplicity with which the favored soul receives it and, without excessive attachment to it, communicates it briefly to its spiritual director, whom it obeys perfectly as the minister of Jesus Christ.²⁶²³ The gift of prophecy may, it is true, be found in those who do not possess these qualities, but such an exception is rare.

Before regulating its conduct, at least indirectly, by a private revelation, a soul that is truly enlightened by God will always consult its director or some other learned and discreet person who will examine the matter from the point of view of faith, theology, and supernatural prudence. St. Teresa insists particularly on this point²⁶²⁴ This is especially necessary since the soul may easily go astray in the interpretation of revelations, either because it considers them too literally and according to habits tainted with egoism, or because they are sometimes conditional.²⁶²⁵ A learned, prudent, and virtuous confessor, however, has graces of state which make him avoid error, especially when he prays humbly, fervently, and assiduously for these graces. He himself then receives the inspirations of the gift of counsel that he may see clearly and judge rightly.

What should be thought of the desire for revelations? St. John of the Cross, who often invites interior souls to desire humbly, but confidently and ardently, the infused contemplation of the mysteries of faith and the divine union resulting therefrom,

strongly reproves the desire for revelations. On this point he is in complete accord with St. Vincent Ferrer,²⁶²⁶ and shows that the soul desiring revelations is vain; that by this curiosity it gives the devil the opportunity to lead it astray;²⁶²⁷ that this inclination takes away the purity of faith,²⁶²⁸ produces a hindrance for the spirit,²⁶²⁹ denotes a lack of humility,²⁶³⁰ and exposes it to many errors.²⁶³¹ To ask for revelations shows also a lack of respect toward Christ, because the fullness of revelation has been given in the Gospel.²⁶³² God sometimes grants these extraordinary favors to weak souls,²⁶³³ or again to strong souls that have an exceptional mission to accomplish in the midst of great difficulties; but to desire them is at least a venial sin, even when the soul has a good end in view.²⁶³⁴ They are of value only because of the humility and love of God which they awaken in the soul.²⁶³⁵ All this shows clearly the error of imprudent directors who, impelled by curiosity, are concerned with souls favored by visions and revelations.²⁶³⁶ This curiosity is a deformation of the spirit which casts the soul into illusion and trouble, and turns it away from humility through vain complacency in extraordinary ways.

Finally, St. John of the Cross insists strongly on the fact that the desire for revelations turns the soul away from infused contemplation. He says: "The soul imagines that something great has taken place, that God Himself has spoken, when in reality there is very little, or nothing, or less than nothing. In truth, of what use is that which is void of humility, charity, mortification, holy simplicity, silence, etc.? This is why I affirm that these illusions offer a great obstacle to divine union, for if the soul makes much of them, this fact alone drives it very far from the abyss of faith.... The Holy Ghost enlightens the recollected intellect according to the measure of its recollection. The most perfect recollection is that which takes place in faith.... Infused charity is in proportion to the purity of the soul in a perfect faith: the more intense such charity is, the more the Holy Ghost enlightens the soul and communicates His gifts to it."²⁶³⁷ No words could more strongly condemn the desire for revelations and make the soul long for that perfect spirit of faith, which is found in infused contemplation and which leads to almost continual intimate union with God.

As we have pointed out several times, it is, therefore, a serious error, rather frequently committed, to confound the desire for revelations with a desire for infused contemplation. Not only is the former blameworthy, but it also turns the soul away from infused contemplation, which is highly desirable. St. John of the Cross thus gives us the loftiest commentary on St. Thomas' words: "Sanctifying grace is much nobler than gratia gratis data."²⁶³⁸ In other words, sanctifying grace (with charity and the seven gifts connected with it) is far superior to the charisms, and even to prophecy, the highest of all. This statement puts clearly before us the whole scope of St. Paul's teaching on the eminence of charity.²⁶³⁹

However, at this point in our study we must distinguish two kinds of private revelations: (1) revelations properly so called reveal secrets about God or His works; (2) revelations improperly so called give a greater understanding of supernatural truths already known by faith.²⁶⁴⁰

1) Revelations manifesting secrets to us are much more subject to illusion. Without doubt God sometimes reveals to the living the time that remains to them on this earth, the trials that they will undergo, what will happen to a nation, to a certain person. But the devil can easily counterfeit these things and, to gain credence for his lies, he begins by nourishing the spirit with likely things or even with partial truths.²⁶⁴¹ St. John of the Cross says: "It is almost impossible to escape his wiles if the soul does not immediately get rid of them, because the spirit of evil knows well how to assume the appearance of truth and give this appearance credit."²⁶⁴² "In order to be perfect there is, therefore, no reason to desire these extraordinary supernatural things.... The soul must prudently guard itself against all these communications if it wishes, in purity and without illusions, to reach divine union by the night of faith."²⁶⁴³ No words could make a clearer distinction between these extraordinary supernatural things and infused contemplation, and more effectively show that infused contemplation is normal in the perfect.

2) Revelations improperly so called, which give us a greater understanding of revealed truths, are associated with infused contemplation, especially if they concern God Himself and do not stop at particular things, but profoundly penetrate His wisdom, infinite goodness, or omnipotence. In *The Ascent of Mount Carmel* St. John of the Cross says on this subject: "This profound loving knowledge is, moreover, accessible only to a soul in union with God. Such knowledge is this union itself, for it has its origin precisely in a certain contact of the soul with the Divinity. Consequently it is God Himself who is felt and tasted, though He is not perceived manifestly in full light, as He is in glory; but the touch is so strong and so profound, by reason of the knowledge and attraction, that it penetrates the substance of the soul. It is impossible for the devil to interfere in this and to deceive by imitation, for nothing is comparable to it, or approaches it in enjoyment and delights. These touches savor of the divine essence and of eternal life, and the devil cannot counterfeit such lofty things.... In regard to the other perceptions, we said that the soul should abstract itself from them, but this duty ceases in the case of this lofty loving knowledge, since it is the manifestation of that union to which we are trying to conduct the soul. All that we have taught previously on the subject of despoliation and of complete detachment was directed toward this union; and the divine favors which result from it are the fruit of humility, of the desire to suffer for the love of God, with resignation and disinterestedness as to all reward."²⁶⁴⁴

Divine revelations sometimes take the form of visions and at other times of words. Supernatural visions are either sensible, imaginary, or intellectual.

Sensible or corporal visions of our Savior, the Blessed Virgin, or the saints, are sometimes granted to beginners to detach them from worldly things. If the vision is common to a great number of persons, it is a sign that the apparition is exterior, without any certainty thereby that it is of divine origin.²⁶⁴⁵ If it is individual, the dispositions of the witness who declares that he has had it must be attentively examined and great prudence must be exercised.

The director will be able to recognize whether these apparitions are graces of God, by their conformity to the teaching of the Church and by the fruits which they leave in the soul. The soul itself should be very faithful in reaping the fruits of sanctity which God proposes by granting it these favors. Those who are favored with apparitions of our Lord, the Blessed Virgin, and the saints should render to the persons represented the honors due them, even though the apparition should be the result of an illusion of the imagination or of the devil, for as St. Teresa says: "Although a painter may be a wicked man, honor should none the less be paid to a portrait of Christ done by him."²⁶⁴⁶ These apparitions must never be desired or asked of God.

Imaginary visions are produced in the imagination by God or by the angels when a person is either awake or asleep. According to the Gospel, St. Joseph was on several occasions supernaturally instructed in a dream. Although the divine origin of a dream may be difficult to discern, ordinarily when the soul seeks God sincerely, He makes Himself felt either by a feeling of profound peace, or by events that confirm the vision; thus in a dream a sinner may be warned of the urgent necessity of conversion.

Imaginary visions are subject to the illusions of the imagination and of the devil.²⁶⁴⁷ We have three signs, however, by which to discern whether they are of divine origin: (1) when they cannot be produced or dismissed at will, but come suddenly and last but a short time; (2) when they leave the soul in great peace; (3) when they produce fruits of virtue, a great humility and perseverance in good.²⁶⁴⁸

A divine imaginary vision, granted while a person is awake, is almost always accompanied by at least partial ecstasy (for example, the momentary loss of sight) so that the soul may distinguish the interior apparition from external impressions;²⁶⁴⁹ there is ecstasy also because a soul enraptured and united to God loses contact with external things.²⁶⁵⁰ No perfect imaginary vision occurs without an intellectual vision, which makes the soul see and penetrate its meaning;²⁶⁵¹ for example, the former may concern the sacred humanity of Christ; the second, His divinity.²⁶⁵²

Imaginary visions should not be desired or asked of God any more than sensible visions; they are in no way necessary to holiness.²⁶⁵³ The perfect spirit of faith and infused contemplation are of superior order and prepare the soul more immediately for divine union.²⁶⁵⁴

An intellectual vision is the certain manifestation of an object to the intellect without any actual dependence on sensible images. It is brought about either by acquired ideas supernaturally coordinated or modified, or by infused ideas, which are sometimes of angelic order.²⁶⁵⁵ It requires, besides, an infused light, that of the gift of wisdom or of prophecy. It may refer to God, spirits, or material things, like the purely spiritual knowledge of the angels. The intellectual vision is at times obscure and indistinct, that is, it manifests with certitude the presence of the object without any detail as to its intimate nature. Thus St. Teresa often felt our Lord Jesus Christ near her for several days.²⁶⁵⁶ At other times the intellectual vision is clear and distinct; it is then more rapid and is a sort of intuition of divine truths or of created things in God.²⁶⁵⁷ It cannot be translated into human language.²⁶⁵⁸

Intellectual visions, especially those caused by infused ideas, are free from the illusions of the imagination and of the devil; but at times what is only an over-excitement of the imagination or a suggestion of the devil²⁶⁵⁹ may be taken for an intellectual vision. The divine origin of these favors may be recognized from the effects they produce: deep peace, holy joy, profound humility, unshakable attachment to virtue.²⁶⁶⁰

St. John of the Cross says: "By the very fact that this knowledge is communicated suddenly, independently of the will, it is useless for the soul to desire it...; it ought simply to allow God to act when and how He wills.... These favors are not given to a soul which is attached to any good; they are the effect of a special love which God bears toward the soul which strives for Him in detachment and disinterested love."²⁶⁶¹

The loftiest intellectual visions, since they are inferior to the beatific vision, cannot attain the divine essence *sicuti est*, but only "by a certain manner of representation" due to infused ideas, as St. Teresa says.²⁶⁶² In the opinion of a number of authors,²⁶⁶³ the intellectual visions that often accompany the transforming union are the equivalent of a special revelation that gives the soul the certitude of being in the state of grace and of predestination. St. John of the Cross even says, as we have seen: "In my opinion, the soul can never be placed in possession of this state [the transforming union] without at the same time being confirmed in grace."²⁶⁶⁴

Supernatural Words and Divine Touches

Supernatural words are manifestations of God's thought which are heard either by the exterior senses or by the interior senses or immediately by the intellect.

THE DIFFERENT KINDS OF SUPERNATURAL WORDS

An auricular supernatural word is a vibration formed in the air by the ministry of angels. For example, St. Luke records²⁶⁶⁵ that Zachary heard the angel Gabriel speak to him. The same angel Gabriel said to Mary: "Hail, full of grace."²⁶⁶⁶ Like corporal visions, these locutions are subject to illusions; the same rules should be applied to them to discern those of divine origin.

Imaginary supernatural words are heard by the imagination, when the person is either awake or asleep. They sometimes seem to come from heaven; at other times from the depths of one's heart. They are perfectly distinct, although not heard with bodily ears.²⁶⁶⁷ They are not easily forgotten; those especially which contain a prophecy remain graven on the memory.²⁶⁶⁸ To recover the exact statement of the words heard, it is sometimes necessary that the person who has heard them should recollect himself and make mental prayer; in this way he can avert the slightest variation.

These supernatural words can be distinguished from those of our spirit by the fact that they are not heard at will, and that they are words and works at one and the same time. For example, when they reprove us for our faults, they suddenly change our interior dispositions and render us capable of undertaking everything for the service of God.²⁶⁶⁹ It is then easy to discern them.²⁶⁷⁰

When imaginary words come from the devil, they not only do not produce good effects, but, on the contrary, produce evil effects. The soul is disturbed, troubled, frightened, disgusted; and if it experiences any sensible pleasure, it is very different from divine peace.²⁶⁷¹ These diabolical words resemble supernatural words of divine origin as glass beads resemble diamonds. It is often easy to perceive the difference immediately.

Intellectual words are heard directly by the intellect without the intermediary of the senses or imagination, in the way the angels communicate their thoughts to one another at will. They suppose a divine light and the coordination of pre-existent acquired ideas, and at times of infused ideas.²⁶⁷² As St. Teresa says: "It is a wordless language, which is the tongue of the fatherland."²⁶⁷³

Theologians teach, with St. John of the Cross, that intellectual words may be either successive, formal, or substantial.²⁶⁷⁴ We shall recapitulate their teaching here.

Successive intellectual words are produced only in the state of recollection; they come from our spirit which is enlightened by the Holy Ghost, and with such facility and new views that the understanding cannot imagine that they spring from its own depths.²⁶⁷⁵ These successive words are subject to illusion, for the spirit, which at the beginning followed only the truth, may deviate and even go seriously astray, inasmuch as the devil often insinuates himself into these successive words, especially when people are attached to them. He acts thus with even greater reason toward those who are bound to him by a tacit or formal act, with heretics who persist in their errors, and especially with heresiarchs.²⁶⁷⁶

Successive words come from God when they simultaneously produce in the soul an increase of charity and humility. But it is sometimes difficult clearly to discern supernatural love from a certain natural love, and true humility from pusillanimity. Therefore it is not easy to recognize the divine origin of successive words.²⁶⁷⁷ They should not be desired, for obscure faith is far superior to them.²⁶⁷⁸

Formal intellectual words are so called because the soul knows formally that they are uttered by another, without any contribution on its part... and it can hear them when not recollected, and even when far from thinking of what is said."²⁶⁷⁹ They are, therefore, quite different from those we have discussed, and are at times very precise; for example, Daniel says that an angel spoke to him.²⁶⁸⁰ The Lord sometimes leads souls in this way to great things, at the same time allowing a certain repugnance to the fulfillment of the divine order to subsist.²⁶⁸¹ If, on the contrary, God inspires humiliating things, He gives greater facility to accomplish them.²⁶⁸²

These formal intellectual words are in themselves free from illusions, since the understanding cannot contribute anything to them, and the devil cannot act immediately on the intellect.²⁶⁸³ Nevertheless his artifices may be taken for words of God, by confounding what immediately touches the intellect with what takes place in the imagination. "Consequently," says St. John of the Cross,²⁶⁸⁴ "what they say should not be immediately translated into action, nor should they be held in esteem no matter what

their origin. It is indispensable to make them known to an experienced confessor or to a discreet and learned person.... If an experienced person is not to be found, the soul should keep whatever is substantial and sure in these words; disregard the rest; and speak of it to no one, lest a counselor be found who would do the soul more harm than good. The soul should not place itself at the mercy of anyone at all, for it is of prime importance whether one acts judiciously or is deceived in such matters.”

Substantial intellectual words are formal locutions which effect immediately what they announce. We read in *The Ascent of Mount Carmel*:

For example, God says formally to a soul: Be good!, and instantly the soul becomes good. Or He says: Love Me!, and at once the soul possesses and experiences in itself true love of God. Or again He may say: Fear nothing!, and at that very instant, strength and peace come upon that soul... Thus, God said to Abraham: “Walk before Me, and be perfect,”²⁶⁸⁵ and instantly perfection was given to him, and thenceforth he walked reverently before God.... A single one of these words instantly operates more good than the efforts of a lifetime. When the soul receives such locutions, it has only to abandon itself; it is useless to desire or not to desire them, for there is nothing to repulse, nothing to fear. The soul ought not even to seek to effect what is said, for God never utters substantial words in order that we should translate them into acts; He Himself brings about their effect. This is what distinguishes them from successive and formal locutions.... Illusion is not to be feared here, for neither the understanding nor the devil can interfere in this matter.... Substantial words are, therefore, a powerful means of union with God.... Happy the soul to which God addresses them.²⁶⁸⁶

God’s words are living flames in purified souls.²⁶⁸⁷

DIVINE TOUCHES

There is a fourth kind of favor which “frequently”²⁶⁸⁸ accompanies lofty infused contemplation, that is, divine touches, which are imprinted in the will and which “react on the intellect.... They give, thus, a very lofty and sweet intellectual penetration of God.”²⁶⁸⁹ These touches are thereby attached to “particular and distinct contemplation.”²⁶⁹⁰ They do not depend on the activity of the soul, or on its meditations, although these prepare the soul for them.

These divine touches are occasionally so deep and intense that they seem imprinted “in the very substance of the soul.” How should this be understood? God, in fact, preserves the very substance of the soul in existence by a virtual contact, which is creation continued.²⁶⁹¹ In it He also produces, preserves, and increases sanctifying grace, whence the infused virtues and the gifts spring.²⁶⁹² He also moves the faculties, either by proposing an object to them, or by applying them to the exercise of their acts, and that from within.²⁶⁹³ The divine touch of which we are speaking is a supernatural motion of this type, but one of the most profound. It is exercised on the very depths of the will and of the intellect, where these faculties take root in the substance of the soul, whence they arise.²⁶⁹⁴

Blosius, when explaining what Tauler calls the depth of the soul, tells us that it is the origin or the root of the higher faculties, *virium illarum est origo*.²⁶⁹⁵ In truth, our will is, in a way, infinite in its profundity, in the sense that God alone can fill it; hence created goods cannot exercise an invincible attraction on it. It is free to love or not to love; only God seen face to face infallibly attracts it and captivates it, even to the very wellspring of its energies.²⁶⁹⁶ So-called substantial divine touches²⁶⁹⁷ affect this depth of the will and of the intellect. The very substance of the soul can operate, feel, perceive, and love only through its faculties; it has received them for that purpose. In this it differs from the divine substance, which alone, because God alone is pure Act, operates immediately by itself without having need of faculties.²⁶⁹⁸ But God, who is closer to the soul than it is to itself, inasmuch as He preserves it in existence, can from within touch and move the very foundation of the faculties by a contact, not spatial but spiritual (*contactus virtutis, non quantitativus*), which reveals itself as divine. Thus from within God moves the soul to the most profound acts, to which it could not move itself.

With this in mind, we understand why St. John of the Cross says on this subject:

Nothing is more calculated to dissipate this delicate knowledge than the intervention of the natural spirit. Since it is a question of a sweet supernatural communication, it is useless to try to comprehend it actively, for that is impossible; the understanding has only to accept it. If, on the contrary, the soul seeks to provoke it or desires it, it may happen that what it conceives comes from itself, and thereby gives the devil the opportunity of presenting counterfeit knowledge.... Passive acceptance in humility is, therefore, incumbent on the soul. God grants these favors according to His good pleasure, and it is the humble and thoroughly detached soul that receives God’s preference. By acting in this way, the progress of the soul suffers no interruption, and such knowledge serves efficaciously to advance it. These touches are touches of union serving to unite the soul passively to God.²⁶⁹⁹

This wholly intimate action of God on “the depths of the soul” is that in which everything terminates and, in a sense, that in which everything began, without our having been aware of it. This influence of the Holy Ghost on the depths of the soul, where He produced, preserves, and increases sanctifying grace, in fact precedes, without our knowing it, His influence on the faculties. The completely purified soul experiences this action in its very depths, when it has at length entered the sanctuary where God dwells and operates from the moment of justification. Therefore the great mystics have spoken so much of this depth of the soul and of this “substantial” action of God in which everything has its beginning, and at which everything terminates, when the soul reverts to its principle.²⁷⁰⁰ It is like a spiritual kiss imprinted by Christ, the Spouse of souls, on the depths of the will, which replies to Him with the most ardent love: “My Beloved to me, and I to Him.” This divine touch is

quite frequent in the transforming union or the spiritual marriage.

Evidently this favor of the divine touch, like many substantial words, is directly ordained to the sanctification of the person who receives it. It is, however, distinct from infused contemplation or from the mystical state, which it sometimes accompanies. Infused and obscure contemplation continues, in fact, when these touches, which are transitory, have ceased. The fact is that they are very sanctifying and may be more or less explicitly desired with the intimate union which they produce, but this desire should be humble and supernatural.^{[2701](#)}

We must guard against confounding the mystical state (prolonged infused contemplation and the union with God which results from it) with extraordinary facts notably distinct from union. Neither should we lessen the mystical state by confounding it with fervent and simplified affective meditation, which is acquired and not infused. The mystical, or passive and infused, state begins with the passive recollection and prayer of quiet, described by St. Teresa in the fourth mansion. Neither should a chasm be interposed between the initial mystical state and the transforming union, described in the seventh mansion. This last mansion alone is, in this life, the culminating point of the development of grace, the virtues, and the gifts, and the immediate disposition to receive the beatific vision to which we are all called.

Stigmatization and Suggestion

In recent years a study has again been made of the following problem: Can suggestion and autosuggestion produce the stigmata, that is, the marks of our Lord's passion, which a number of saints during ecstasy have received on their feet, hands, side, and forehead, with intense sufferings extraordinarily reminiscent of those of Christ crucified for us? These wounds appear without having been caused by any exterior wound, and periodically fresh blood flows from them. The first known stigmatic is St. Francis of Assisi. Since his day the cases have multiplied, but it seems certain that stigmatization occurs only in ecstasies and is preceded and accompanied by very acute physical and moral sufferings, which configure the soul to Jesus crucified. Can so exceptional a phenomenon be explained by suggestion in certain highly emotional subjects, as some unbelievers claim?

This question is examined at length by several physicians, psychologists, and theologians in the well documented number of the *Etudes carmelitaines* for October, 1936.²⁷⁰²

Dr. Lhermitte, associate professor in the Medical School in Paris, offers a negative reply to this problem in an interesting report. He says:

Even admitting that by hypnotic suggestion ecchymoses, vesicles and bloody sweats may be produced, can we say that the problem of stigmatization would be solved?... We cannot admit it.... Even though cutaneous ecchymoses were reproduced by pure suggestion, we would still have to produce symmetrical ecchymoses terminating in lasting wounds, rebellious to infection and slow to heal.... Contrary to those who, under the cover of experimental science and of so-called positive facts, maintain that we can apprehend the processus of mystical stigmatization in one of its parts, we claim that, in spite of a few very deficient data given to us by experimentation and clinical research, we are as far from the explanation of the stigmata as in the days of Charcot, Bourneville, Bernheim, and Virchow.²⁷⁰³

We know specifically that Pierre Janet tried unsuccessfully for long years to produce stigmata by hypnotic suggestion.

The opinion opposed to that of Professor Lhermitte is defended in the same number of the *Etudes* by Dr. van Gehuchten of the University of Louvain²⁷⁰⁴ and Dr. Wunderle of the University of Würzburg.²⁷⁰⁵ Both of them think that, under the influence of suggestion, local vasomotor manifestations may be produced which go so far as the formation of blisters and hemorrhages. Dr. Wunderle cites a case of this kind, produced by suggestion in a Protestant woman in Dr. Lechler's sanatorium in Germany.

The second of these opinions has, we believe, in its favor only confused and weak data, as Professor Lhermitte says.

THE TRADITIONAL TEACHING

In favor of the traditional doctrine, we are happy to point out here what Father Louis Sempe, S.J., wrote recently in an excellent article on this subject after the Congress of Avon-Fontainebleau.²⁷⁰⁶ We quote this article all the more willingly because it expresses very exactly what we ourselves would have wished to say had we taken part in the congress. We shall italicize what seems to us most important in it.

Father Sempe believed, though without reason, that we conceded conditionally (if the facts are exact) Dr. Wunderle's opinion. This impression was created by the manner in which Father Lavaud, O.P., of the University of Fribourg, in this same number of the *Etudes*,²⁷⁰⁷ expressed at one and the same time his own thought and our opinion, forgetting to mention a traditional argument, which has always seemed to us very important and on which we shall insist at the end of this chapter.

Father Sempe justly remarks:

It is not that we deny to hypnotic suggestion the power to produce the effects that they tell us about. We would not dare a priori to concede it or to refuse it; let experience decide the matter. But, in our humble opinion, this is not the crux of the question. It is, so it seems to us, the fact that true stigmata, those of the saints, the only ones which the Church takes into consideration, are not in their entity wounds like the others. Beyond the fact that they are always located in the same places in the body as they were in Christ and occasionally attain the same dimensions as they did in Him, their behavior differentiates them essentially, we believe, from ordinary wounds.

To recall only their best verified characteristics, they are as rebellious to all medication as they are inaccessible to corruption: no dressing heals them, and they never suppurate, although frequently open and exposed to the air for years.²⁷⁰⁸ They occasionally heal suddenly and perfectly, to such a degree that the scar tissue is as elastic and strong as the surrounding skin, as pliable and resistant to pinching and twisting as the rest of the skin, though it is still possible to see the form and the dimensions of the wound underneath.... Finally, true stigmata bleed periodically, depending on the liturgical feasts of Christ and the Blessed Virgin.²⁷⁰⁹ They may bleed on the days to which some of these feasts have been transferred, contrary to the expectation of the subject who was unaware of the transference.

Are these not miraculous characteristics? But they point out nothing similar to us in connection with red spots, vesications, erosions, little drops of blood, obtained with so much trouble in certain neuropathic subjects by the aid of suggestion.²⁷¹⁰

It has also been occasionally observed that when the stigmatic is lying on his back, the blood flows from the wounds in his feet

as it flowed from Christ's wounds, and therefore *in the direction contrary to gravity*.

The abundance of the hemorrhages is also unexplained. The stigmata are generally on the surface, far from the large blood vessels, and yet they bleed copiously.²⁷¹¹

These physical particularities of stigmatic wounds differentiate them notably, in fact, from other wounds, as Dr. Lhermitte pointed out. And the description which is generally given of the stigmata of the saints presents these physical particularities and likewise the moral circumstances of this exceptional fact, notably the lively compassion for the sufferings of our Savior.

Special attention should be paid to the fact that the stigmata, properly so called, are found only in persons who practice the most heroic virtues, and who have in particular great love of the cross.

Stigmatics enter into the depths of the mystery of the redemption, into the secret of the moral and physical sufferings of Christ, or of His immolation for the salvation of sinners. Here is something that has no relation to the patients of clinics for nervous diseases. It is precisely to recall His dolorous passion to our indifferent minds and hearts that our Savior chooses victims whom He thus visibly or invisibly configures occasionally to His crucifixion.

To neglect this loftier aspect in stigmatization, in order to be able to explain this fact naturally, is to consider in it only the material cause while closing one's eyes to the formal cause and to the final cause, consequently to the true efficient cause. It is as if one defined a statue solely by the wood or marble of which it is made, prescind from its form, its true end, and the artist who had this end in view. To explain the superior by the inferior, naturalism should, like materialism, reduce the superior to its material cause, that is to say, disfigure it to the point of making it unrecognizable. The natural ecchymoses of which we are speaking resemble true stigmata as glass beads resemble diamonds.

Moreover, just as to judge well of a human act, of its meaning, and its import, one must be attentive to its circumstances, each of which theologians study in particular and enumerate in the wellknown expression: *Quis, quid, ubi, quibus auxiliis, cur, quomodo, quando*,²⁷¹² so to judge rightly of the meaning and import of an exceptional fact like stigmatization, one should most attentively note its physical and moral circumstances. Special attention should be paid to those related to the stigmatic's end (*cur*), manifested either before, by a prayer or a promise, or afterward, by the effects, by a great love of the cross; those relating to the object (*quid*), for example, the corporeal wounds produce keen physical suffering accompanied by a delicious spiritual wound, which, as St. Teresa²⁷¹³ and St. John of the Cross²⁷¹⁴ say, can come only from God; those relating to the person (*quis*), which consist in the fact that he is humble, obedient, animated by a great charity; those relative to the means (*quibus auxiliis*), by the exclusion of all clever trickery and occultism; lastly, those relative to the time and the place (*ubi et quando*).

If all these circumstances are favorable, one may have moral certitude of the supernatural origin of the stigmata. It is evident that it is not a question of a pathological fact, but that there is in the case the intervention of a free and intelligent cause which acts on the stigmatics to configure them to Jesus crucified.

Finally, God alone can produce what is most lofty in stigmatization: the spiritual wound of the heart, which St. Teresa speaks of in the sixth mansion.²⁷¹⁵ This wound, which has as its effect an ardent desire for God and a great love of the cross, attains the most intimate depth of the spiritual will; therefore it can come only from God. It is at one and the same time most painful and delightful, and, as St. Teresa says, the soul would wish never to recover from it.²⁷¹⁶

ECSTASY AND STIGMATIZATION

A study has recently been made again as to whether great supernatural compassion for the sufferings of our Savior, intensified by ecstasy, may have as a natural result the corporeal stigmata.

St. Francis de Sales replies in the negative to this question in his *Treatise on the Love of God*, where he says: "Love has wonderful power to sharpen the imagination, so that it may penetrate even to the exterior.... But the love which was within [St. Francis of Assisi] simply could not produce openings in the flesh on the exterior. That is why the burning seraphim, coming to its help, darted at the saint rays of such penetrating light that it actually pierced the flesh with the exterior wounds of the Crucified which love had imprinted interiorly on the soul"²⁷¹⁷

The reply given by St. Francis de Sales is confirmed by the following traditional argument quoted by Benedict XIV,²⁷¹⁸ Many men and women saints of widely different temperaments have had a very intense supernatural compassion for the sufferings of our Savior, and have not had the stigmata, which appear for the first time in the thirteenth century in St. Francis of Assisi. No one has ever affirmed that the Blessed Virgin, St. Mary Magdalen, or St. John the Evangelist had these divine corporeal wounds, and yet who more greatly compassionated the sufferings of Jesus crucified? Likewise, since the thirteenth century, many men and women saints, of widely divergent temperaments, with or without ecstasy, have had this lively supernatural compassion without having the stigmata. Among them are even great mystics, like St. John of the Cross, who have had a lofty degree of infused contemplation, accompanied by ecstasy and even the spiritual wound of the heart.

Does this not prove that the stigmata are not the natural consequence of lively supernatural compassion, and that ardent love

does not suffice to produce them? Such is the conclusion of Bartholomew of Pisa and, after him, of Theophilus Raynaud, of Benedict XIV²⁷¹⁹ as opposed to Francesco Petrarch and Pomponazzi. This traditional argument is undoubtedly quite general, but in our opinion it preserves all its value. In recent discussions, it was not sufficiently examined and nothing was adduced that could weaken it.

In the number of the *Etudes carmelitaines* already mentioned, Dom Aloysius Mager, O.S.B., dean of the Faculty of Theology of Salzburg, and Dr. Wunderle, of Würzburg, strongly incline to consider stigmatization as the ideoplastic contrecoup on the organism of the infused contemplation of Jesus crucified. In their opinion it would, thanks to the power of the imagination, be a natural result of a great supernatural compassion. As the apprehension of blushing makes one blush, the imagination united to a lively supernatural emotion could produce corporeal stigmata. This is a return to the ideoplastic theory which St. Francis de Sales rejected. What is it worth?

Father Sempe, in the article we quoted, offers a just criticism of this explanation:

In the first place, this theory, since it is basically autosuggestion, supposes that there is always at the origin of the stigmata the two necessary factors of autosuggestion, that is, an extremely vivid representation of Jesus crucified coupled with a profound compassion for His sufferings and an ardent desire to receive these wounds. Now, these necessary factors do not, however, always exist. Among the best characterized and most authentic cases of stigmatization, there are some in which the subject did not desire, imagine, or even suspect as possible the impression on his flesh of the wounds of the Crucified. Indeed, a number of stigmatics have even begged Christ to spare them these exterior marks, and their prayer was not granted.

In conformity with the exigencies of this theory, its proponents also assume that the stigmatic pain precedes the exterior wound. Such is not always the fact. There are cases in which the subject at first felt no local pain, and never even thought of the stigmata. The wounds were made on his body from the exterior by a blinding blow of luminous rays, and immediately the pains, extremely sharp pains, began....

But if it is the luminous rays which cause the wound, why bring in, by dint of hypotheses, the ideoplastic power of the imagination? Would not this psychological instrument be unnecessary since the rays exist? Does not the scientific method demand economy?²⁷²⁰

Theologians have often asked how it is that the majority of stigmatics received the divine wounds without suggestion or autosuggestion, without expecting them, and without wishing them?

Blessed Raymond of Capua relates in his Life of St. Catherine of Siena,²⁷²¹ that on August 18, 1370, the saint received the stigmata in an altogether unexpected manner following a prayer and a divine promise of the salvation of several persons; stigmatization was produced to confirm this promise. The absolutely unforeseen pain was as sharp as if her hand had been pierced with an iron nail driven by a hammer. At the petition of the saint, the stigmata remained invisible during her life. Later in the presence of several witnesses worthy of credence, the supernatural renewal of the fact took place with such effect that the saint swooned suddenly before their eyes, as if she had been mortally wounded. The fact and its supernatural origin are, moreover, attested by the saint, and her testimony is confirmed by the humility of her entire life, which led her to ask and obtain immediately the invisibility of this exceptional favor. In this case we see how all the physical and moral circumstances of the fact confirm its origin.

Thus we return to the explanation offered by St. Francis de Sales, which seems the wisest. It is our crucified Lord Himself who, by means of luminous rays, imprints the wounds on the bodies of stigmatics, whom He wishes to configure to His passion that He may remind us of it. Evidently the traditional argument of Bartholomew of Pisa, preserved by Benedict XIV, retains all its value. To sum it up again: Many men and women saints, of widely different temperaments, have been absorbed with ardent love in the infused contemplation of the sufferings of Christ and, nevertheless, they have not had the stigmata. Among them must be numbered the Blessed Virgin Mary, St. John the Evangelist, St. Mary Magdalen, and many others prior to St. Francis of Assisi, the first stigmatic, and many others subsequent to him. This is a sign that ardent love, united to infused contemplation, does not suffice to produce the stigmata. Christ Jesus grants them to whom He will, when He will, and as He will. Stigmatization is an essentially extraordinary grace that is not in the normal way of sanctity.

LEVITATION

By levitation is understood the phenomenon of the elevation of the human body above the ground without any apparent cause and in such a way that it remains in the air without any natural support. This phenomenon is also called ascensional ecstasy, ecstatic flight, or ecstatic walking when the body seems to run rapidly without touching the ground.

The Bollandists relate numerous cases of levitation. They cite particularly those attested in the lives of St. Joseph of Cupertino (September 18), St. Philip Neri (May 26), St. Peter of Alcantara (October 19), St. Francis Xavier (December 3), St. Stephen of Hungary (September 2), St. Paul of the Cross (April 28), and others. It is related that St. Joseph of Cupertino, seeing some workmen having trouble in trying to put up a very heavy mission cross, took his aerial flight, seized the cross, and without effort placed it in the hole destined for it.

In contradistinction to levitation, they cite cases of extraordinary weight of the bodies of certain saints: for example, when an attempt was made to violate and drag St. Lucy of Syracuse to a place of debauchery, her body remained fixed to the earth like

the pillar of a church.

Suggestion or autosuggestion of hysterical persons has never been able to provoke levitation. After an examination extending over several years, Professor Janet of Paris was able to establish that the body of the person was never raised, even a millimeter, even sufficiently to slip a cigarette paper between his feet and the ground.²⁷²²

Rationalists have tried to explain naturally the levitation proved in the case of several saints by the deep breathing of air into the lungs; but, in the face of the manifest insufficiency of this reason, they have had to have recourse to an unknown psychic power an explanation that is merely so many words.

Benedict XIV states the traditional and reasonable explanation.²⁷²³ He requires first of all that the fact be well proved in order to avoid all trickery. Then he shows: (1) that because of the law of gravity, well-proved levitation cannot be naturally explained; (2) that it does not, however, exceed the powers of angels and the devil, who can lift bodies up; (3) that consequently the physical, moral, and religious circumstances of the fact must be carefully examined to see whether there is not diabolical intervention; and that, when the circumstances are favorable, one can and must see in it a divine or angelic intervention, which grants to the bodies of the saints an anticipation of the gift of agility which is proper to glorified bodies.

LUMINOUS EFFLUVIA

Ecstasies occasionally present luminous phenomena; the body is enveloped in light, and in particular the forehead. Benedict XIV examines this fact as he does that of levitation.²⁷²⁴ He points out that one must make sure whether the phenomenon can be explained naturally: at what time of the day or of the night it is produced; whether the light is more brilliant than any other; whether the phenomenon is prolonged for a notable length of time and renewed several times. Particular attention must also be paid to the moral and religious circumstances: whether the phenomenon is produced during a sermon, a prayer, an ecstasy; whether effects of grace, lasting conversions, and so on, result from it; whether the person from whom this light comes is virtuous and holy. If all these attentively examined conditions exist, as it were an anticipation of the brightness of glorified bodies may be seen in this exceptional fact.²⁷²⁵

FRAGRANT EFFLUVIA

During the lifetime of the saints or after their death, their bodies occasionally give off perfumes. The faithful have always seen in this fact a sign of the good odor of the virtues they practiced. This fact has often been proved; in particular the stigmata of St. Francis of Assisi gave off a sweet odor. When St. Teresa died, the water with which her body was washed became perfumed. When, long after his death, the tomb of St. Dominic was opened, his perfectly, preserved body exhaled a celestial odor.

To make sure of the supernatural character of the fact, it should be ascertained whether the sweet odor endures, whether anything near the body can explain it naturally, whether effects of grace result from this exceptional phenomenon.²⁷²⁶

PROLONGED ABSTINENCE

Lastly, there are saints, especially among the stigmatics, who have lived for months and even years without taking any other food than the Blessed Eucharist. Notable examples of this fact are St. Catherine of Siena, St. Lidwina, Blessed Catherine Racconigi, Blessed Angela of Foligno, and St. Nicholas of Flue.

On this subject Benedict XIV²⁷²⁷ says that the fact must be attentively examined over a considerable length of time by constant surveillance, and by recourse to numerous witnesses expert in detecting trickery. An examination must be made, to determine whether abstinence is total and extends to liquid food as well as to solid nourishment, whether it is lasting, and whether the person continues to devote himself to his occupations. Under such conditions the fact cannot be explained naturally.

The same thing must be said of very prolonged lack of sleep, such as has been proved, for example, in the lives of St. Peter of Alcantara, St. Dominic, and St. Catherine de Ricci.

In these divers exceptional phenomena, after extensive examination of the fact itself, of its physical, moral, and religious circumstances, one sees that the body, far from weighing down the soul, as happens only too often, becomes the instrument of the soul whose spiritual beauty, infused light, and ardent love it allows to shine through. These outward signs are given us from time to time to show us, even in a sensible manner, that perfect Christian life is the prelude of eternal life.

These exceptional phenomena, when superficially examined, are like a stained-glass window in a church seen from without; from the exterior, their meaning and import cannot be grasped. But, when examined more attentively in the twofold light of right reason and faith, they resemble a stained-glass window seen from within under its true light; then all their beauty can be appreciated. We see this particularly when we permeate our souls with the liturgy for the feasts of the stigmata of St. Francis of Assisi and of St. Catherine of Siena. The prayers of the Mass and the Office for these two feasts are of a rare splendor, like

those for the Mass of the transverberation of St. Teresa.

To enkindle love for Jesus crucified in the hearts of the faithful, Paul V extended the feast of the stigmata of St. Francis of Assisi (September 17) to the universal Church. The prayer for the Mass is as follows: “Lord Jesus, who at a time when charity was growing cold in the world, to enkindle our hearts with the fire of Thy love, didst renew the sacred stigmata of Thy passion in the flesh of the Blessed Francis, grant us, in Thy goodness, that by his merits and prayers, we may continually bear the cross and bring forth worthy fruits of penance. Thou who livest,” and so on. In this prayer we see the great realism of the Church, which to the highest elevation of thought unites the effective practice of all the virtues.^{[2728](#)}

Differences Between Extraordinary Divine Facts and Morbid Phenomena

The extraordinary facts discussed in the preceding chapter, particularly stigmatization, levitation, and so on, which occasionally accompany ecstasy are so well proved that positivists cannot deny their existence. They try, however, to liken them to certain morbid phenomena proceeding from psychoneuroses, especially hysteria.

The saints are, as a matter of fact, subject, like other men, to illness; but we are concerned with discovering whether, in spite of their maladies, they are mentally sane and well balanced.²⁷²⁹

We shall point out here, as many psychologists and theologians have already done, the differences: (1) on the part of the subject; (2) on the part of the phenomena; (3) on the part of the effects. After these general remarks, we shall indicate by some examples how to proceed to the examination of certain particular facts.

DIFFERENCES ON THE PART OF THE SUBJECT

Patients afflicted with psychoneuroses are unbalanced from a mental point of view, whereas true mystics and ecstasies manifest perfect moral equilibrium.

Dr. E. Regis thus characterizes the mentality of hysterical subjects:

Many hysterical subjects have a distinctive mental state, easily recognizable. From early youth, future hysterical subjects—for we are speaking here especially of hysterical members of the feminine sex—stand out by reason of particular characteristics. In the majority of cases, they are girls of intellectual brilliancy, precocious in the extreme, impressionable, coquettes, seeking to draw attention to themselves, clever in feigning and lying, subject, moreover, to nocturnal terrors, dreams, and nightmares. Hysteria once established, the mental and moral state of its tributaries is characterized principally, where the intellect is concerned, by an excessive mobility, which makes the patients incapable of perseverance and of any stable idea;... they are absolutely incapable of succeeding in any serious endeavor. In addition, they have a very manifest tendency to contradiction, controversy, paradoxical ideas... likewise to imitation, suggestion, and autosuggestion. Morally the state is the same: a bizarre, capricious, fantastic, immoderately mobile character;... duplicity, untruthfulness, cleverness in simulating, deceiving, inventing; brusque and untimely propensity to the most perverse acts, as well as to most meritorious actions of bravery and display; continual need to make a spectacle of themselves, and so on.²⁷³⁰ Then come subconscious fixed ideas, hallucinations even outside of any delirium properly so called, attacks with delirium, finally mental deterioration and madness.

It is evident that mental disturbance is increasingly accentuated, the intellect directs the patient's conduct less and less, the memory splits, sometimes to the extent that the patient believes that he has two personalities; soon there is nothing left in the mind except a small number of fixed ideas; whence arises a certain mono-ideism bordering on madness. With the diminution of the intellect, goes the weakening of the will; the emotions get the upper hand, gradually the personality disappears, and caprice dominates.²⁷³¹

In true mystics and ecstasies, on the contrary, it has been established that their intellect grows through their knowledge of God, the divine perfections, the dogmas of faith, and also through their profound knowledge of themselves. They declare that in a few moments of contemplation they learn more than by reading all books on the interior life. In these moments they receive a higher light which makes them glimpse, as it were, a superior synthesis of all they already knew, a living, luminous synthesis which, arousing the impulse of the will, makes them undertake and carry out great things with admirable, persevering courage in spite of almost unbelievable difficulties. The lives of St. Catherine of Siena and of St. Teresa illustrate this fact.

In addition, true mystics are humble, charitable, submissive to the divine will amid even the greatest trials. In them is patent the connection and the harmony of the most dissimilar virtues, and, dominating all, a love of God and of neighbor and a wisdom that give them peace and wonderful serenity. Properly speaking, they represent the inverse of the passionate agitation and inconstancy of hysterical subjects. This fact is evident in their labors for the successful prosecution of a difficult undertaking; likewise their perseverance in good, their constant love of the truth, united to reserve and humility, give proof of it.

DIFFERENCES ON THE PART OF THE PHENOMENA

No less difference exists. between true ecstasy and what has been called hysterical ecstasy. It suffices to have assisted once or twice at this latter manifestation in hospitals to see that there is no resemblance whatever between the two.

In attacks of hysteria, as Dr. E. Regis says,²⁷³² there is a delirium of illusion, clearly hallucinatory in character or marked by memories or lengthy monologues. Fundamentally it is one and the same delirium, but corresponding to different degrees of depth of the illusion. The first phase of the crisis resembles a light attack of epilepsy, but is distinguished from it by the sensation of a ball that rises in the throat; the person experiences a feeling of suffocation, which comes from the swelling of the

throat. The second phase consists in inordinate gestures, contortions of the whole body, especially in arched circles. The third is that of passionate attitudes of fright, jealousy, lubricity in relation to the obsessing image. The crisis ends by attacks of tears or of laughter, which relax the patient. On coming out of these crises, the subjects are exhausted. In short, there are different phases, epileptoid, clownish, plastic, and passionate (called hysterical ecstasy), the crisis terminating in exhaustion of the body, dulling of the mind, collapse of the whole being.

In true ecstasy, on the contrary, there are no convulsions, violent agitation, passionate attitudes of fright, jealousy, and so on; there is calm, the rapture of a soul profoundly united to God by one of those passive recollections which God alone can give and which considerably surpass the recollection that proceeds from our personal effort of concentration. There is absolutely no relation between so-called hysterical ecstasy and the ecstasy, for example, of Bernadette during the apparitions of Lourdes. In a real ecstasy there is no morbid excitation, no strange agitation, no entirely physical delectation, followed by depression. Ecstasy is the movement of the whole being, both body and soul, toward the divine object present in the imagination or intellect. Ecstasy ends in the calm return to the natural state, with simple regret over the disappearance of the celestial vision and the wholly spiritual joy that it gave. St. Teresa even points out in her *Life*²⁷³³ that this state, which should weaken the body, on the contrary, gives it new strength.

DIFFERENCES IN THE EFFECTS

These differences are more and more marked. In hysterical subjects when the crises increase, the unbalanced mental condition grows and with it dissimulation, lying, brutalization, lascivity, and finally capricious sensuality completely dominates the intellect and will. If mono-ideism is present, it springs from the disorganization and disintegration of the personality, and from mental confusion which leads to madness.

In true mystics and ecstasies, on the other hand, there is a growing development of the understanding of divine things, of those of the interior life, of the life of the Church, of all that touches on the salvation or the loss of souls. There is likewise a steady increase in the love of God and in devotion to their neighbor, as shown by the works they undertake and often bring to success, to such a degree that their foundations last for centuries.

St. Francis of Assisi, the stigmatic of Alvernia, founded in the thirteenth century a religious order that is still one of the most numerous in the Church. St. Thomas Aquinas, during his ecstasies, dictated whole chapters on the mystery of the Blessed Trinity and saw from a superior point of view the entire synthesis of theological science.

St. Catherine of Siena, who died at the age of thirty-two and who for a long time could neither read nor write, played a role of primary importance in the affairs of her day, particularly in the return of the popes to Rome.

In spite of opposition on the part of many, St. Teresa founded before her death sixteen convents for women and fourteen for men.

If in hysterical subjects there is mono-ideism (for lack of other ideas), for example, the fixed idea of suicide, in true mystics there is one great idea which subordinates all others to itself in perfect harmony; in other words, the thought of God, of His immense goodness toward us and the profound and radiating conviction that we must correspond to His love. It is not the disintegration of the elements of a man's personality; rather it is their perfect subordination according to the very order of charity: God loved above all else, then souls to be saved. This is why, even from the human point of view, as a number of unbelieving psychologists have recognized, the saints are great organizers. Although an unbeliever, De Montmorand writes on this subject: "True mystics are people of experience and action, not of reasoning and theory. They have the sense of organization, the gift of commanding, and reveal themselves well endowed for business. The works that they found are capable of surviving and enduring; in the conception and direction of their enterprises, they give proof of prudence, of daring, and of that just appreciation of possibilities which characterizes good sense. And, as a matter of fact, good sense seems to be their fundamental quality; good sense untroubled by an unhealthy exaltation and a disordered imagination, and coupled with the most unusual power of penetration."²⁷³⁴ This we see exemplified in St. Paul, St. Augustine, St. Bernard, St. Dominic, St. Francis of Assisi, St. Thomas Aquinas, St. Bonaventure, St. Teresa, and so many others.²⁷³⁵

AN EXAMINATION OF SOME PARTICULAR FACTS

Occasionally in the lives of mystics and ecstasies we find evidence of a given fact that might suggest the hypothesis of hysteria. We shall give an example of blindness which we have studied particularly. It is known that functional blindness and even temporary paralysis are occasionally found in hysteria and may last even beyond the crisis and for a long time.

In Father Estrade's life of the Arabian Carmelite, Sister Mary of Jesus Crucified,²⁷³⁶ we read that in her youth in the Orient the servant of God was stricken with blindness which lasted forty days, that she recovered her sight instantaneously after a prayer to the Blessed Virgin, and that at the moment of her cure she felt something fall from her eyes. In another life of the same Carmelite,²⁷³⁷ the fact is reported in an identical manner. Is this blindness for forty days a sign of hysteria in this Carmelite

who had frequent ecstasies accompanied by levitation?

To answer this question and every other one of the same kind, the moral and physical qualities of the subject should first be examined. In the case under discussion, the constitution of the servant of God was healthy and even strong; her corpulence and the incessant work she performed do not permit us to classify her among neuropaths or among psychopaths. No functional malady was observed in her. Moreover, she never had the signs of typical hysteria, or the precursory symptoms, or the crises with epileptoid, clownish, plastic, passional phases, or delirium followed by physical exhaustion. Instead of discovering inconstancy or untruthfulness in her, one sees perseverance in good, love of the truth, purity, reserve, and humility. Should the fact of this forty-day blindness, nevertheless, be attributed to hysteria? Is it a symptom of this malady?

On this subject we shall make a few observations which are applicable to several similar facts:

1. The nature of hysteria is not yet well known; some see a neurosis in it, others a psychosis, others the two at once, to such a degree that Professor Lassegue, of the Paris Academy of Medicine, said, as reported in *L'Ami du clerge*: "The definition of hysteria has never been given, and it is possible that it never will be.... It is a basket into which people throw the papers that they do not know how to classify."²⁷³⁸ Since this malady has not yet been sufficiently defined, it has not as yet, properly speaking, differential symptoms, such, for example, as Koch's bacillus for tuberculosis. What seems to be fixed is the form of the hysterical crisis, with its precursory symptoms and the different phases of the crisis. Blindness is occasionally, but not always, found in it; therefore, among the signs of this malady that are customarily cited, it is not a cardinal symptom.

2. Moreover, blindness occurred only once in the life of the servant of God of whom we are speaking.

3. She has not one of the peculiar symptoms of hysteria, not any of the precursory symptoms, not any of the phases of the crisis. In the syndrome of these symptoms, blindness would have contributed to proving something; without them, it proves nothing.

4. On the other hand, the particular cadre of Sister Mary of Jesus Crucified harmonizes sufficiently with that of mystical ecstasy described by St. Teresa.

5. Persons least favorably inclined to the servant of God never said that she was hysterical. A doctor at Pau who had suspected this malady and sought to make sure of it, one day witnessed her extraordinary state and admitted that it was ecstasy.

All these observations show that the temporary blindness of which we are speaking did not originate in hysteria.

6. There is a confirmation of our opinion in the reasons which lead to the conclusion that it was an organic malady. It occurred, in fact, in the Orient where blind persons are notably more numerous than elsewhere because of the brilliant glare of the sun, the whiteness of the earth, the calcareous dust carried by the wind, the coolness of the nights and the fact that people sleep on the flat roofs, and finally because of the lack of hygiene, because of flies and other insects.²⁷³⁹

7. There is a final reason, and one not to be disregarded, related by the two above-mentioned biographers of the servant of God, namely, that at the moment when her blindness was cured "she felt that something fell from her eyes." This same remark is made by those who are cured of organic blindness caused by leucoma (albugo), well known in pathology, that is, the yellowish spot which forms between the layers of the cornea in several inflammations of the eyeball or of one of its parts.

These different reasons lead us to think that blindness in this case is organic and not functional, and consequently not hysterical.

Particular facts, more or less similar to this case, may be examined in the same way by considering, first of all, the qualities of the subject and the particular details of the fact itself, to see whether or not it is related to one or another symptom of hysteria or of some other psychoneurosis.²⁷⁴⁰

The director will be able and sometimes will be obliged to consult a competent physician. An attentive examination, well conducted from both the medical and the spiritual point of view, will often give moral certitude, especially if it is accompanied by prayer, great disinterestedness, and perfect purity of intention in the search for truth.

NOTE

In the "Congress on Religious Psychology" of Avon-Fontainebleau (September 21–22, 1938), the reports of which are assembled in the *Etudes carmelitaines* (October, 1938), the following question was raised: "In what measure are sanctity and lofty mystical life compatible with pathological disturbances?" Father Bruno, who organized the Congress, believed that the entire result could be summed up in the following proposition: "Theologians and doctors who were consulted believe possible the concomitance of normal mystical life and of certain psychopathological states not to be identified with insanity. However, it appears that definitive and incrustating anomalies are not compatible with regular mystical elevation." In accord with Father

de Guibert and Father de Tonquedec, we admit this proposition with some reservations. During the same Congress, Doctor A. Delmas, who also admits the possibility of a lofty interior life in lucid moments for a cyclothymic like Father Surin, declared that nevertheless true hysteria does not seem to him compatible with an eminent moral life; such a state would constitute a veritable enigma.^{[2741](#)}

The articles of Dr. Biot on these questions may be read with profit.^{[2742](#)}

Diabolical Phenomena

²⁷⁴³The persecutions of the devil comprise all that one may have to suffer from him: temptations, obsession, possession. On this subject we must recall, first of all, the theological principle which throws light on these problems: the action of the devil does not go beyond the sensible part of the soul and cannot be exercised immediately on the intellect or the will.

St. Thomas²⁷⁴⁴ says in substance that, since every agent acts for an end which is proportionate to it, the order or subordination of agents corresponds to the order of the ends. God alone can incline our intellect to universal truth and our will to the universal good, and finally to Himself, the Sovereign Good. Therefore He alone can act immediately on our intellect and will, according to their natural inclination, which comes from Him and which He preserves. *Solus Deus illabitur in anima.*

With the permission of God, however, the devil can attack us by acting on our imagination, our sensibility, on external objects, and on our body to incline us to evil.²⁷⁴⁵ He often limits himself to temptation by way of suggestion and more or less impetuous movements; but occasionally his action goes as far as obsession and in certain cases even to possession.

In these matters two excesses must be avoided: attribution to the devil of what proceeds from the triple concupiscence or from certain morbid states, or, on the contrary, unwillingness to admit his intervention in any case, in spite of what Scripture and tradition tell us about it.

We shall sum up here the traditional teaching on obsession and possession.

OBSESSION

Obsession is a series of temptations that are more violent and prolonged than ordinary temptations. Rarely does the devil act only on the exterior senses; more frequently, through the imagination; he provokes lively impressions of the sensible appetites in order to trouble the soul. He may act on the sight by loathsome apparitions or, on the contrary, seductive apparitions;²⁷⁴⁶ on the hearing, by making a racket²⁷⁴⁷ or by making the person hear blasphemous or obscene words;²⁷⁴⁸ on the touch, by inflicting blows or by embraces of a nature to lead to evil.²⁷⁴⁹ There are cases in which these apparitions are not corporeal, but imaginary or produced, like hallucination, by nervous overexcitement.

The direct action of the devil on the imagination, memory, and passions, may produce obsessing images, which persist in spite of energetic efforts and which lead to anger, to very lively antipathies, or to dangerous affections, or again to discouragement accompanied by anguish. Those whom the enemy of good persecutes in this way feel at times that their imagination is as if bound by thick shadows, and that over their heart rests a weight which oppresses them. This powerlessness is entirely different from that proceeding from the divine action which, in bestowing infused contemplation, renders discursive meditation more or less impracticable. The enemy of God, in his jealous desire to imitate the divine action, seeks to cause the effect of God's action to deviate, in such a way that, in the passive purifications, the soul occasionally finds itself between the special action of God, which inclines it to a spiritual life more freed from the senses, and an inverse action, which in its way strikes it with powerlessness in order to cause the effect of the divine action to deviate and to throw the soul into utter confusion.

If the temptations of which we are speaking are sudden, violent, and persistent, and no illness explains them, a special influence of the devil may be seen in them.

Obsession may be so strong that it deserves the name of diabolical siege. Scaramelli says: "In the diabolical siege, the devil stays near the person whom he besieges as a captain does near a place which he surrounds closely with his troops. But he has no stable and permanent power over the body of the obsessed person (which occurs only in possession); and once the time of purification is ended, the devil himself raises the siege and goes off without exorcisms, without injunction."²⁷⁵⁰

By what sign may one recognize that obsession is related to the passive purification of the senses? Obsession may be linked with the passive purification of the senses if the obsessed person works seriously at his perfection, in particular if he is humble, obedient, charitable, and if he has the three signs of the night of the senses indicated by St. John of the Cross. On the other hand, astute, very subtle persons may, for interested motives, seek to make themselves pass for victims of the devil, in such a way especially as to excuse excessively compromising exterior faults which they commit.

In dealing with obsessed persons, the director should be prudent and kind; he should not believe too readily in a true obsession; he should remind the penitent, first of all, how temptation must be resisted, pointing out that it is an occasion to acquire great merits by a salutary, firm, at times heroic reaction, and by the practice of humility. He should remind the penitent

that the principal remedies are humble, trusting prayer, recourse to the Immaculate Virgin, to St. Michael, to the guardian angel, the trusting use of the sacraments and sacramentals, scorn of the devil, who may indeed bark, but who can bite only those who draw near him. The director should also remind his penitent that, if in the violence of temptation disorders are produced without any consent, there is no sin in them. In case of doubt, he will judge that there is no serious sin when the person concerned is habitually well disposed. If he sees that the obsession is part of the passive purification of the senses or of the spirit, he will give appropriate counsels, which we recalled earlier in the course of this study.²⁷⁵¹

Lastly, if diabolical obsession is morally certain or very probable, the priest may employ privately the exorcisms prescribed by the Roman Ritual or shortened forms. To avoid agitating the penitent or overexciting him, it is best, as a rule, not to inform him beforehand that one is going to pronounce over him the words of private exorcism; it is sufficient to tell him that one is going to recite over him a prayer approved by the Church.

POSSESSION

What is possession? By possession the devil really dwells in the body of the victim, instead of only making his action felt from the outside, as in obsession. Moreover, by thus acting from within, he not only hinders the free use of a man's faculties, but he himself speaks and acts by the organs of the possessed person, without the latter being able to hinder him from doing so, and even as a rule without his perceiving it.

When we say that the devil dwells in the body of a person, we do not mean that he is there like the soul itself which informs the body, but like a motor which, through the body, acts on the soul. He acts directly on the members of the body, makes them execute all sorts of movements, and he acts indirectly on the faculties in the measure in which they depend on the body for their operations.

Two states are distinguished in possessed persons: a state of crisis, with contortions, outbursts of rage, blasphemous words; and a state of calm. During the crisis, the patient generally loses, it seems, the feeling of what is taking place in him, for afterward he has no memory of what the devil has, they say, done through him. Nevertheless, as an exception, there are possessed persons who remain aware of what is taking place in them during the crisis. This was, it seems, the case with Father Surin, who, while exorcising the Ursulines of Loudun, himself became possessed or at least obsessed. He said: "In this state, there are very few actions in which am I free."²⁷⁵²

In the state of calm, the devil seems to have withdrawn, although there may still remain at times chronic infirmities which physicians do not succeed in curing.

As a rule possession is more properly a punishment than a purifying trial. However, there are exceptions, like the case of Father Surin, that of Blessed Eustochium of Padua, beatified by Clement XIII, on March 22, 1760,²⁷⁵³ that of Marie des Valleees, spiritual daughter of St. John Eudes.²⁷⁵⁴ Mention must also be made of the more recent case of Sister Mary of Jesus Crucified, an Arabian Carmelite who died in the odor of sanctity at Bethlehem in 1878, and the cause of whose beatification has been introduced. She was twice the victim of possession, or at least of a very strong obsession, first at the Carmel of Pau, later at that of Mangalore.²⁷⁵⁵ There have been other similar cases, in which possession was a concomitant phenomenon of the passive purification of the senses or that of the spirit, in souls that offered themselves as victims for sinners.

What are the signs of real possession? Great care must be taken to distinguish it from certain cases of monomania and of mental alienation which resemble it. According to the Roman Ritual (*De exorcizandis obsessis a daemonio*), there are three principal signs: "To speak an unknown language, making use of several words of this language or understanding him who speaks it; to disclose distant and hidden things; to manifest strength which surpasses the natural powers of the subject, considering his age and state. These and other similar signs, when united in great number, are the strongest indications of possession." They are particularly striking, for example, if a person who does not know either Latin or theology or knows only their rudiments, speaks in correct and even elegant Latin about the most difficult problems of theology, like that of the gratuity of predestination.²⁷⁵⁶ It is true that people adduce cases of morbid exaltation which awaken in the memory forgotten languages or fragments that have been heard; but in this question the Ritual demands much more, as we have just seen. Accompanying possession at times is levitation, a preternatural phenomenon which manifests itself under circumstances of such a nature that they cannot be attributed to God or to the good angels, but must be attributed to the devil. According to tradition, this was the case with Simon Magus who, they say, was lifted into the air and fell down.

Another indication of possession is that on coming into contact with a sacred object or on the recitation of certain liturgical prayers, the person believed to be possessed becomes furious and blasphemes horribly. This sign is more significant when the experience is brought about without the knowledge of the person, in such a way that the reaction is not produced by him, by his ill will, or by a desire to simulate possession.

It has been pointed out, apropos of these signs, that in extreme hysteria there are analogous phenomena.²⁷⁵⁷ Analogous, it is true, but not specifically similar; in hysteria the patient does not discourse in a language of which he is ignorant and in a

learned manner on problems of which he has no knowledge at all, such as predestination or the efficacy of grace. Besides, the devil can produce either nervous diseases, or exterior phenomena analogous to those of neuroses; he may also make use of an existing illness and reduce the patient to a state of exasperation.

What are the remedies for possession? The Ritual indicates the following: (1) The possessed person must do penance and purify his conscience by a good confession.(2) He should receive Holy Communion as often as possible, according to the advice of a prudent and enlightened confessor. The more pure and mortified a soul is, the less hold the devil has on it; Holy Communion introduces into the soul the Author of grace who is the conqueror of Satan. However, Holy Communion should be given only in moments of calm.(3) The possessed person should often implore the mercy of God by prayer and fasting.(4) With a great spirit of faith he should make use of sacramentals, in particular of the sign of the cross and holy water.²⁷⁵⁸ He should have trusting recourse to the invocation of the holy name of Jesus, of His humility, His immense love.(5) Lastly, the exorcisms were instituted for the deliverance of possessed persons in virtue of the power of driving out devils which Jesus Christ left to the Church. But solemn exorcism may be performed only by priests chosen by the bishop of the place and with his special authorization.

The Ritual counsels exorcists to prepare themselves for this difficult function by prayer, fasting, and a humble and sincere confession, so that the devil may not reproach them with their own sins. In addition, solemn exorcism should, at least as a rule, be performed only in a church or chapel. The exorcist should be accompanied by grave and pious witnesses, sufficiently strong to overpower the possessed person if necessary. Lastly, the exorcist should proceed to the interrogations with authority, rejecting all that is useless. He summons the devil or the devils to declare the reason for the possession and to tell when it will end. To oblige the enemy of God to do this, the exorcist must redouble the adjurations which seem to irritate the devil most, that is, the invocations of the holy names of Jesus and Mary. If the evil spirit makes sarcastic and derisive answers, silence must be imposed upon him with authority and dignity. The witnesses should be few in number, they must not ask questions, but should pray silently. The exorcisms should be continued for several hours and even for several days, with intervals of respite, until the deliverance, which should be followed by prayers of thanksgiving.

Many authors point out that the exorcisms are not always efficacious against obsession. They do not deliver the soul completely from an obsession which is part of the passive purifications, for God permits it for a time known to Him, in view of the great advantages which the soul should derive from this trial.

A STRIKING EXAMPLE

We have studied particularly the diabolical vexations which Sister Mary of Jesus Crucified had to undergo in 1868 in the Carmel of Pau and in 1871 in that of Mangalore, not only according to the account given by Father Estrate in her Life and the shorter report by Father Buzy, but also according to the testimony gathered by her directors and superiors. We are convinced that in her case there was, on two different occasions, possession or at least a strong obsession which took away from the servant of God the responsibility for certain exterior acts (a short departure from the cloister, which was not yet canonically established) and for certain remarks contrary to humility and obedience, virtues which she practiced in a heroic degree, even in those obscure periods, as soon as she recovered the use of her faculties.²⁷⁵⁹

We think there was in this case not a punishment, but a trial and very great merit. As Father Estrate,²⁷⁶⁰ who was one of the directors of this valiant Carmelite, points out, she bore these diabolical vexations with heroic patience, a very great spirit of faith, an admirable confidence in God, an ardent love of God and of souls. As long as she preserved freedom of movement and the use of speech, she spent hours at a time replying to all the suggestions of the devil. The devil had permission to attack her one hundred times in the Carmel of Pau, and he sought by every means to make her utter a complaint; “always conquered, he begged the Master to be allowed not to continue the struggle. Jesus obliged him to go on.” The servant of God did not cease to reply to his assaults by words such as these: “I offer my sufferings for the enemies of Jesus, that they may love Him as St. John did.” The devil was forced to say: “Do you know why the little Arab speaks thus? Why is she strong? Because she walks in the steps of the Master.” At length at the end of forty days she was freed.²⁷⁶¹

This case furnished an example of one of the greatest trials which may accompany the passive purifications of the senses or the spirit. It brings out strikingly the truth of what St. John of the Cross says on this subject: “There is open warfare between two spirits.... This attack of the devil takes place also when God bestows His favors upon a soul by the instrumentality of a good angel. The devil sees this occasionally, because God in general permits it to become known to the enemy, that he may do what he can [that is, if God grants the soul extraordinary favors, He often permits the devil to fight as if with equal arms, by extraordinary vexations].... At that time the mental agonies are great and occasionally surpass all description; for when spirit has to do with spirit, the evil one causes an intolerable horror in the good one.”²⁷⁶² All authors of mystical theology express the same opinion, and there are similar facts in the lives of many canonized saints.

The example we have just recalled and others more or less similar are made clear in the light of what St. John of the Cross

teaches in *The Dark Night* on the night of the senses and that of the spirit. He states that these nights are tunnels through which generous souls, called to a high degree of perfection, to true sanctity, must pass. If a soul emerges from the first tunnel with a heroic degree of the virtues and if, on leaving the second, the heroic quality of its virtues is even more manifest, it is a certain sign that it did not go astray in these very dark and difficult passages, but, on the contrary, gained very great merits therein. These trials are more particularly painful for souls that have a reparatory vocation and that must, in imitation of our Lord, suffer for the salvation of sinners.

In these exceedingly painful dark nights, the soul may occasionally commit a sin, even a serious sin, as happened to the Apostle St. Peter during the dark night of our Savior's passion. But if, like St. Peter, the tried soul rises immediately with deep repentance, it receives a notable increase of grace and charity and it continues its ascent from the very spot where it stumbled for a moment. "Wherefore the penitent sometimes arises to a greater grace,"²⁷⁶³ says St. Thomas.

It follows that these obscure periods in the lives of the servants of God, far from being an obstacle to their beatification, on the contrary bring out more clearly the heroic degree of their virtues. Those who have passed through them have triumphed over the most difficult trials which the saints meet with in this life. This is especially true of those who fight more directly against the devil, and who in this way show more clearly the depth of the reign of God in souls that are wholly submissive to Him. Thus are realized occasionally in an extraordinary manner the words of St. Paul: "But the foolish things of the world hath God chosen, that He may confound the wise; and the weak things of the world hath God chosen, that He may confound the strong. And the base things of the world, and the things that are contemptible, hath God chosen, and things that are not, that He might bring to nought things that are."²⁷⁶⁴

NOTE

The article entitled "Possession" in the *Dictionnaire theologique catholique* states: "In our Western civilizations, men would be inclined to say that the devil is interested instead in dissimulating his action. Does he not hold men so much the better when they ignore or deny him?"²⁷⁶⁵ But, as Father L. de Grandmaison points out: "In the regions where the Gospel penetrates intensively for the first time, it still encounters, as in ancient times, a sort of occult power, usurped but established, which, by its resistance and manifestations, perfectly recalls the convulsions of the evil spirits in the presence of Jesus. There is hardly a missionary in those countries who has not encountered it."²⁷⁶⁶

Why does God permit these diabolical manifestations? St. Bonaventure answers: "It is either for the manifestation of His glory (by constraining the devil, by the mouth of the possessed person, to confess, for example, the divinity of Christ), or for the punishment of sin, or for the correction of the sinner, or for our instruction."²⁷⁶⁷

In practice, possession should be admitted only on solid proofs or indications, and the spiritual director should secure the opinion of an experienced physician. St. Philip Neri, although he "thought that persons whom people believe to be possessed by the devil are, in the majority of cases, either sick, melancholy, or mad, nevertheless, judging a certain Catherine, a noble lady of Aversar, to be truly possessed, he freed her from this terrible evil."²⁷⁶⁸

On temptation in general and its causes, we advise the reading of the excellent articles by Father Masson, O.P., which were published in *La Vie spirituelle*, from 1923 to 1926: I. "Temptation in general, its nature, universality, necessity" (1923, p. 108). II. "Its sources: the flesh (ibid., pp. 193, 333); the world (p. 421); the devil (1924, p. 270; (the tempter, his work, p. 384, his mode of suggestion, by ruse, by violence, his stubbornness; the limits of his power; resistance to temptation)." III. "The processus of temptation" (1926, p. 493). IV. "End of the temptation on the part of the devil, on the part of God: why does God permit temptations? Justice and mercy" (1926, p. 644).

EPILOGUE

The Axis of the Spiritual Life and its Unity

To conclude, we shall return to our starting point. The problem of the axis of the spiritual life is a catechetical question worth examining theologically, if it is true that the most elementary truths are those which become the most vital and profound when meditated on for a long time, and end by being the object of our contemplation.

Among these elementary truths, is the following: the axis of the spiritual life is found in faith, hope, and charity. Failure to recognize this truth would be an unpardonable error, which would prove that one had lost the meaning of Christian doctrine. But, with respect to this elementary and fundamental question, there are more subtle problems which we must consider at the end of this work.

Someone wrote recently that the division between “ascetical” and “mystical” theology is “a regrettable division, whose error consisted precisely in telescoping sanctifying grace and its peculiar organism of the divine virtues between moralism and mysticism. (The history of modern spirituality is witness to this.)” “St. Thomas did not conceive or build his moral theology on this division, but rather on the following plan: the moral virtues, the theological virtues (subsequently modifiable by the gifts in the interior of their object). Otherwise a considerable section of the Second Part (all the admirable analysis of the regime of the virtues) loses its import and seems impregnated with semi-naturalism, as if the supernaturalness of the gifts was the only integral supernaturalness, that of the virtues being only semi-supernatural”²⁷⁶⁹

What is true in these observations? The answer depends on the way the terms “ascetical” and “mystical” are understood. They should have a good meaning since they are commonly accepted in the Church; but they have not always been understood in the same way. It is, consequently, important to return to this point.

We are happy to see with what insistence the writer of these pages speaks of sanctifying grace and the infused virtues, but he surprised us by reproaching certain Thomists, who in recent years have treated more particularly of the gifts of the Holy Ghost, with having “exaggerated the role of the gifts to the detriment of the theological virtues.”

It may be that someone gathered this impression by reading articles written for the purpose of treating especially of infused contemplation, properly so called, and of the passive states, articles in which it was indeed necessary to place the emphasis on the gifts of understanding and of wisdom and their superhuman mode. But we must remind our readers that for the last thirty years or so we have hardly ceased to defend the essentially supernatural character of infused faith (independently of the gifts), by reason of its essential object and its formal motive.²⁷⁷⁰

In the domains of dogmatic theology, moral theology, and spirituality, we have always said that all the infused virtues, both theological and moral, are intrinsically and essentially supernatural by reason of the formal object that specifies them. We have not ceased to defend the principle: *Potentiae, habitus et actus specificantur ab objecto formali*.

In our opinion it would be a gross error to think that the description given by St. Thomas of the moral virtues is impregnated with semi-naturalism. Semi-naturalism would consist in being more attentive to the (intrinsically natural) acquired moral virtues than to the infused moral virtues. It would consist in aiming rather at being a perfect upright man, master of self, than at being a child of God increasingly conscious of his dependence on his heavenly Father and more and more docile to divine inspirations. One might thus reach the state of attributing in part to oneself the respect due to God, which would be a serious error.

It is also fully evident (to ignore the fact would be unpardonable) that, as Father Lemonyer so rightly insisted, the axis of the supernatural life passes through the theological virtues. We have not ceased to say so under different forms,²⁷⁷¹ and Father Lemonyer himself graciously recognized, in what he wrote on theological prayer, how well founded is what we have been saying for a long time about common prayer,²⁷⁷² in which, in our opinion, faith, hope, and charity are exercised especially.

This statement contains an elementary truth that certainly deserves to be penetrated deeply. No theologian would think of denying it; but its importance in spirituality may be more or less great according to the idea one has of the distinction between ascetical theology and mystical theology.

THE DISTINCTION BETWEEN ASCETICAL AND MYSTICAL THEOLOGY AS IT HAS OFTEN BEEN PROPOSED SINCE THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY

The distinction between ascetical and mystical theology is not a division of the virtues, like that between the theological and the moral virtues; it is a distinction between two forms of the spiritual life. Ascetical and mystical theology is the application of the teaching of dogmatic and moral theology to the direction of souls toward ever closer union with God. It presupposes what sacred doctrine teaches about the nature and the properties of the Christian virtues and of the gifts of the Holy Ghost, and it studies the laws and the conditions of their progress from the point of view of Christian perfection. It causes the lights of

dogmatic and moral theology to converge toward this end.

The distinction between ascetical and mystical theology is inspired by the current meaning and the etymology of these terms. The term “asceticism,” as its Greek origin indicates, means the exercise of the virtues. Among the first Christians those were called ascetics who devoted themselves to the practice of mortification, exercises of piety, and other Christian virtues. Consequently the term “ascetical” was applied to that part of spiritual theology which directs souls in the struggle against sin and in the progress of virtue.

Mystical theology, as its name indicates, treats of more hidden and mysterious things: of the intimate union of the soul with God; of the transitory phenomena that accompany certain degrees of union, as ecstasy; lastly, of essentially extraordinary graces, such as visions and private revelations.

Until the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, writers generally treated under the single title of mystical theology not only the mystical union, infused contemplation, its degrees, and essentially extraordinary graces, but also Christian perfection in general, and the first phases of the spiritual life, the normal progress of which thus seemed directed toward the mystical union as its culminating point. This is the conception found in the mystical theologies of the Carmelites, Philip of the Blessed Trinity, Anthony of the Holy Ghost, Joseph of the Holy Ghost, and of the Dominican Vallgornera, who so often literally reproduced the teaching of Philip of the Blessed Trinity.

Since the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, several authors have deemed it necessary to distinguish absolutely between ascetical theology and mystical theology, which since then have often become subjects of special treatises, such as the *Ascetical Directory* and the *Mystical Directory* of Scaramelli. We wrote in 1920 in one of the first numbers of *La Vie spirituelle*: “Excessively eager to systematize things and to establish a doctrine to remedy abuses, and consequently led to classify things materially and objectively, without a sufficiently lofty and profound knowledge of them, they declared that ascetical theology should treat of the ‘ordinary’ Christian life according to the three ways, the purgative, the illuminative, and the unitive. As for mystical theology, it should treat only of extraordinary graces, among which they included not only visions and private revelations, but also supernatural, confused contemplation, the passive purifications, and the mystical union.”²⁷⁷³

Thereby the unity of the spiritual life was compromised; the perfection which ascetical theology speaks of, became an end and not a disposition to a more intimate and more elevated union. Mystical theology was no longer of any importance except to some rare privileged souls.

For about the last thirty years many theologians have rejected the division thus conceived between ascetical and mystical theology. They have returned to a more traditional doctrine, according to which the ascetical life is a form of the spiritual life in which appears chiefly the human mode of the Christian virtues, while the mystical life is a form of life in which predominates quite manifestly and frequently the superhuman mode of the gifts of the Holy Ghost, which are in all the just. From this point of view, the unity of the spiritual life is better comprehended in spite of the differences between the three successive ages distinguished by tradition: that is, the age of beginners, that of proficients, and that of the perfect, or in other words, the purgative, illuminative, and unitive ways. Thus there is a return to a traditional division more commonly received among the ancients than that between ascetical theology and mystical theology, that is, the division between the active life and the contemplative life, which was dear to St. Augustine and to St. Gregory, and was well explained by St. Thomas.

In the opinion of these great masters, the active life, to which is attached the exercise of the moral virtues of, prudence, justice, fortitude, and temperance,²⁷⁷⁴ and the outward works of charity prepare for the contemplative life, so far as it regulates the passions that disturb contemplation and so far as it makes us grow in the love of God and of our neighbor.²⁷⁷⁵ Then comes the contemplation of God, which is proper to the perfect; it is found either in the purely contemplative life, or in the mixed life which fructifies in the apostolate. Contemplation then directs action from above and renders it much more supernatural and fruitful.²⁷⁷⁶ The contemplative life is chiefly that of the theological virtues and of the gifts which accompany them, as the active life is especially that of the moral virtues.

This traditional division is more profound, more grounded on the very nature of man and also on the nature of grace, the virtues, and the gifts, than the division between ascetical life and mystical life, which may be seriously misunderstood and which it is quite difficult to define clearly.

DISADVANTAGES FROM A WRONG UNDERSTANDING OF THE DIVISION BETWEEN ASCETICAL AND MYSTICAL THEOLOGY

Some souls seem to have gone beyond the essentially ascetical life (or the active life in the meaning given to it by the ancients), which consists chiefly in methodical exercises of piety, united to the practice of mortification or of the Christian virtues that discipline the passions and regulate relations with one’s neighbor. These souls live especially by the theological virtues and, in a more or less latent manner, by the gifts which accompany them. However, they do not yet give evidence of the properly so-called mystical life of passive prayer, described by St. Teresa from the fourth mansion on, and by St. John of the Cross beginning with the clearly characterized passive purification of the senses. The opinion is usually held that the souls we are

speaking of here are in a still imperfect illuminative way, intermediary between the purgative or ascetical way of beginners and the essentially mystical or passive way, which, according to St. John of the Cross, is that of proficient, or the advanced, and that of the perfect.²⁷⁷⁷

The prayer of the souls we are discussing already rises above methodical exercises; it is a simple lifting up of the soul to God by a prolonged act of faith, followed by acts of hope and love of God. It is often called simplified affective prayer; we have described it under the title of the common prayer of the ancients,²⁷⁷⁸ and Father Lemonnier, under the title of theological prayer.²⁷⁷⁹

Souls such as these seem to be in a stage between the ascetical life, properly so called, and the mystical life in the essential meaning of the term, a period which for the most generous is one of transition and which for others is prolonged for their whole lifetime.²⁷⁸⁰

Father Gabriel of St. Magdalen, CD., makes similar observations when he treats of active (or acquired or mixed) contemplation according to Carmelite writers, in whose opinion it is ordinarily a preparation for infused contemplation.²⁷⁸¹ We must also remember that in the prologue to *The Ascent of Mount Carmel* St. John of the Cross says: "Its contents... are a solid and substantial doctrine suited to all, if they seek to advance to that detachment of spirit which is here described. My principal object, however, is not to address myself to all, but only to certain persons of our holy Order of Mount Carmel, of the primitive observance." St. John of the Cross wrote chiefly for the most generous souls among contemplatives, for those who wish to take the road which ascends most directly toward very close union with God.

Manifestly, therefore, there is an intermediate stage between the methodical discursive meditation, described in works on ascetical theology, and infused contemplation properly so called, spoken of by mystical authors.

VARIOUS FORMS OF SIMPLIFIED PRAYER

Even the authors who hold that the infused contemplation of the mysteries of faith is in the normal way of sanctity and that without it there is not the full perfection of Christian life, recognize the difference between the active and the contemplative life. They also say that Marys reach infused contemplation more rapidly than Marthas. Moreover, the former find in contemplation great purifying trials, which at the same time make them work for the salvation of souls.

These authors likewise often distinguish between the acquired prayer of recollection, or simplified affective prayer,²⁷⁸² and, above it, a latent infused contemplation, similar to the diffuse light which pervades the air when the sun is not directly visible, and which illumines everything though it does not itself appear as a distinct ray. We have often spoken of it.²⁷⁸³ In our opinion, it seems certain that St. Vincent de Paul often had, not only during prayer and the celebration of Mass but in his ministry, this latent infused contemplation, which is an act of living faith accompanied by a certain influence of the gifts of the Holy Ghost. Through it he continually saw suffering members of Christ in abandoned children and prisoners condemned to the galleys. Therein lay a frequent although diffuse influence of the gift of wisdom under its practical form. St. Thomas²⁷⁸⁴ points out that this gift, like faith and the gift of understanding, is speculative and practical, in the sense that it bears both on the mysteries to be believed and on the precepts and counsels, or on the conduct of life. In certain servants of God this gift appears more under its practical form, united to the gifts of counsel, fear, piety, and fortitude; in others it appears under its speculative or rather contemplative form, united to the gifts of understanding and knowledge.

Consequently we see why a theologian who is also a man of prayer may often have latent infused contemplation which heightens the activity of his mind and, so to speak, directs his work from on high: for example, that he may ward off useless discussions which would degenerate into personalities; that he may preserve the requisite benevolence toward all; that he may seek especially the profound and fruitful understanding of the mysteries of faith. When we read the works of St. Augustine, we are led to believe that this contemplation often directed his search, illumined from on high the reasons he developed, and made them all converge in a superior synthesis which he finally seized at a single glance. Father Cayre, A.A., has rightly insisted on this point in his beautiful book, *La Contemplation augustinienne* (1927).

To the theologian who, like St. Thomas, often recalls the same principles to illumine questions such as those of grace, free will, merit, and sin, from time to time one of these oft-quoted principles appears in all its elevation and radiance, throwing light on entire tracts, previously studied with patience. Take, for example, the principle of predilection: "No one thing would be better than another if God did not will greater good for one than for another."²⁷⁸⁵ This principle expresses in equivalent terms the thought of St. Paul: "What hast thou that thou hast not received?"²⁷⁸⁶ and contains virtually the doctrine of predestination and that of grace.

In this case the theologian has a contemplation which is in a sense acquired, so far as it is the fruit of his work, and which, in a superior sense, is infused, so far as the special inspiration of the Holy Ghost elevates it in a more or less manifest manner, giving it a penetration and spiritual sweetness surpassing simple faith and theological speculation. Faith adheres to revealed mysteries, the gift of understanding makes us penetrate them, the gift of wisdom makes us taste them.²⁷⁸⁷

Clearly manifest infused contemplation, such as St. John of the Cross describes in *The Dark Night*, especially in Book II, during and after the purification of the spirit, is superior to acquired or mixed contemplation which we have just spoken of. St. Thomas received this contemplation in an eminent degree toward the end of his life, when he could no longer dictate. When we speak of this contemplation, it does not follow that we do not esteem the less elevated forms of knowledge which dispose to it.

We have often insisted on the different aspects of this great problem. In concluding, we revert to this subject in order to show that the axis of the spiritual life is not displaced by ascetical theology or by the mystical theology of the best masters whose teaching the Church approves.

THE AXIS OF THE SPIRITUAL LIFE AND ASCETICAL THEOLOGY RIGHTLY UNDERSTOOD

It suffices to read any good ascetical work, such as the *Introduction to a Devout Life*, by St. Francis de Sales, and the first books of his *Treatise on the Love of God*, where he does not yet deal with contemplation but only with meditation, to realize that the axis of the spiritual life, which rests especially on the theological virtues, far from being displaced in the ascetical life, is already greatly strengthened. The holy doctor says that interior and exterior mortification is a powerful means to draw down upon us the favors of heaven, if we practice it in charity and through charity. He also states very practically that the greatest mortifications are not the best, declaring that ordinary ones, which fall to our lot daily and unexpectedly, are more fruitful and assure the conformity of our will with God's will, signified by the precepts and the counsels. In these pages the saint reminds us that mortification without prayer is a body without a soul, and that prayer without mortification is a soul without a body. In these works he treats not only theoretically but practically of the progress of the virtues illumined by faith and vivified by charity, especially of the progress of the theological virtues. St. Francis de Sales here applies in a practical manner the teaching of St. Thomas in the second part of the Summa, by causing to converge toward daily acts what the Angelic Doctor tells us of virtue in general, of the virtues in particular, their motive, their connection, and their progress. Abstraction separated these questions; ascetical theology reunites them in order to point out to us the road that leads to perfection. It aims at the end to be attained practically rather than at the nature of virtues to be well defined.

Ascetical theology rightly understood, far from being a moral system which fails to recognize the elevation of the theological virtues, is inspired by the breath of these virtues and directed toward a higher life to which it makes the soul aspire. To show how the moral virtues should be at the service of faith, hope, and love of God and of souls in God, to point out how the spiritual life should increasingly dominate every disorder of the sensible part of the soul, triumph over egoism, self-love, and pride under all its forms, certainly is not to change the axis of the spiritual life. It is at times necessary to recall these absolutely elementary truths which the erroneous linking of words would cause us to forget, so much the more so as we are too greatly inclined to dispense ourselves from ascetical effort and as we too readily renounce higher aspirations.

THE AXIS OF THE SPIRITUAL LIFE AND TRUE MYSTICAL THEOLOGY

Likewise the axis of the spiritual life is certainly not changed, the role of the gifts of the Holy Ghost is not exaggerated to the detriment of the theological virtues, when, in company with the greatest spiritual writers, we point out what should be the progress of faith, hope, and charity in the illuminative way;²⁷⁸⁸ when, with St. John of the Cross, we recall how these three virtues are purified during the passive night of the spirit, how their formal motive stands out with increasing relief, like three stars of the first magnitude in this superior obscurity.²⁷⁸⁹ Similarly the role of the gifts is not exaggerated to the detriment of the theological virtues by showing their heroic degree in the unitive life of the perfect, described by the great mystics.²⁷⁹⁰

St. John of the Cross does not exaggerate the role of the gifts to the detriment of the theological virtues; on the contrary he practically never mentions the gifts themselves, but writes continually about faith, hope, and charity, using capital letters to designate these virtues. It would be as unjust to reproach him with having failed to recognize the importance of the gifts as to claim that he falls into a false supernaturalism which neglects the human subject, because he emphasizes the abnegation presupposed by the loftiest perfection. The faith he speaks of not only adheres to revealed mysteries, but is rendered penetrating and often sweet by the influx of the rarely named gifts of understanding and wisdom.

Is faith depreciated by showing what it is in all its sublimity, when it bears all its fruits? The regime of the virtues is not sacrificed to that of the gifts by pointing out what faith is when illumined by the gifts, as several great Thomists have done. Likewise the value of reasoning is not lessened by preparing oneself for the "simple intuition of the truth" which St. Thomas speaks of in connection with circular contemplation.²⁷⁹¹ Because discourse ceases in this contemplation, it certainly does not follow that discourse must be renounced outside of contemplation. In like manner the importance of the study of sacred doctrine is not disparaged by saying it should be made with love of divine truth that prepares the soul for union with God, which is obviously superior to study itself.²⁷⁹²

Let us not stop at the external chaff of words, but penetrate to the kernel of things with a healthy realism. The supernatural virtues are not depreciated when, to explain the highest forms of the life of faith, we speak of the superhuman mode of the gifts

of understanding and wisdom, which make us penetrate and taste revealed mysteries.²⁷⁹³ The same holds true in dealing with the radiant influence of the apostolic life of the greatest saints or of the life of reparation. What might happen, on the contrary, is that, under pretext of defending the superiority of the theological virtues over the gifts, one might diminish these very virtues by failing to recognize the value of the inspirations of the Holy Ghost which cause the spirit of faith, hope, and love of God to grow more and more. By so doing, one would incline toward a moralism that would exaggerate the value of human prudence to the detriment of union with God.

If a Thomist is to give a course in mystical theology, he must certainly speak *ex professo* of infused contemplation, at first latent, then manifest; of its signs, its nature, and its fruits. On this point he may not omit the testimony of St. Teresa or of St. John of the Cross; he should seek to explain it theologically by the principles formulated by St. Thomas. The result would not be a clumsy concordance, nor would the use of this method be reprehensible in writing a work of this kind. Because St. Thomas himself did not write a mystical theology, but gave its principles, he certainly did not forbid the writing of such a text. Similarly, because he did not write the *Praxis confessorii* of St. Alphonsus, he did not exclude the possibility of similar works. It would be narrowness of spirit to renounce, under the pretext of Thomism, the theological treatment of the essential questions of mystical theology, or in treating them to fear a depreciation of the theological virtues which, on the contrary, appear therein in all their loftiness.

We fully agree with what Father Lemonnyer says, in the work we quoted above, about the value of theology: "Grace and the virtues are not realities whose nature, object, mechanism wait to become intelligible to us and to make the spiritual life intelligible to us until we have completed the inventory of ascetical and mystical experiences.... These experiences do not judge the theology of the Church; the theology of the Church judges them, illumines them, and praises them according to their merits."²⁷⁹⁴

The theologian should, moreover, avoid any conceit, which would be more intolerable in him than in many others; it would take away all vitality from his interior life, depriving it of great graces, and would prevent him from understanding as he should prayerful souls, incapable of opening their hearts to him. He should remember that his theological wisdom, acquired *secundum perfectum usum rationis*, is inferior to the infused gift of wisdom, which judges according to the inspiration of the Holy Ghost and its connaturality with divine things.²⁷⁹⁵ St. Thomas possessed these two wisdoms, in an eminent degree; the elevation of the second prevented him from taking satisfaction in the first, to such a degree that at the end of his life, when he could no longer dictate, he was as if lost in God through contemplation.

Dominic Banez, one of St. Teresa's directors, used to say that theologians, after spending years in the study of theology, profit by association with spiritual persons. In fact, if the theologian's personal interior life remains quite mediocre, if he has not persevered in ascetical effort, or led a profound life of prayer, he cannot sufficiently grasp the admirable spiritual riches contained in the treatises which he explains. Then he delays excessively over the rind and does not penetrate sufficiently into the substance. If he is teaching positive theology, he even runs the risk of becoming above all a historian; if he is teaching speculative theology, of being scarcely more than a logician or a metaphysician who speaks about the great supernatural mysteries from a relatively inferior point of view. The same is true of the exegete who interprets the Epistles of St. Paul according to his own mediocre psychology, which scarcely suggests "hunger and thirst for the justice of God." Then everything is depreciated and no longer is a matter of interest.

The spirit of theological science becomes so much the less alive when one dallies too much over what is inferior in it, and when one no longer disposes oneself in this way for "the very fruitful understanding of the mysteries" spoken of by the Vatican Council.²⁷⁹⁶ If, on the contrary, the theologian loves to read the great spiritual writers and if he sees the lives of prayerful souls truly dead to themselves in the midst of the passive purifications which they have had to undergo, and already possessing a very close union with God, then he has the impression of being in a higher atmosphere, very different from that in which one is too preoccupied with one's scientific reputation and with discussions in which self-love and many but slightly interesting petty passions often mingle. From the higher point of view dominated by the gifts of understanding and wisdom, which render faith penetrating and sweet, the theological treatises appear more elevated and profound. We personally taught St. Thomas' treatise on the theological virtues for the first time before we saw souls of prayer that had passed through the passive purification of the spirit. When, after acquaintance with several of these souls, we returned on different occasions to the explanation of St. Thomas' articles relative to faith, hope, and charity, we saw much more in them than we did before. We passed from the confused to the distinct concept of the theological virtues and, in varying degrees, to their experiential concept. Such an experience shows ever more clearly how the theological teaching of St. Thomas sprang from the plenitude of contemplation, to use the expression dear to the saint.²⁷⁹⁷ Then, without clumsy concordance, the teachings of a St. John of the Cross help one to a better understanding of what the Angelic Doctor meant. Often our interior life, which remains too superficial and mediocre, does not enable us to discover this plenitude of meaning; we should, therefore, be grateful to those who help us to do so. This helps us understand why St. Thomas himself said that he had learned more at the foot of the crucifix and before the tabernacle than in books. He spent hours at night in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament, and in this profound

prayer he grew in the knowledge of the spirit of those things of which theological books give us the letter.

What we have said shows that the axis of the spiritual life is found in the theological virtues²⁷⁹⁸ which are superior to the gifts, but which receive from them an added perfection. Faith is essentially supernatural and infallible by reason of its formal motive, but it is more perfect when, under the inspiration of the gifts of understanding and wisdom, it becomes penetrating and sweet; when it gives us the fruitful understanding of the mysteries of the inner life of God, of the redemptive Incarnation, of the infinite value of the Sacrifice of the Mass, of the inestimable treasure of the presence of the Blessed Trinity in us, of the intimate union with God which finds its perfection in the transforming union, the prelude of eternal life. From this point of view, nothing is diminished, but one grasps increasingly better the value of infused faith and notably, below it, that of theology.

THE BEATIFIC VISION AND ITS NORMAL PRELUDE

At the beginning of this work,²⁷⁹⁹ we stated that the life of grace is the beginning of eternal life, according to the traditional formula: “Grace is the seed of glory.” It is essentially the same life in its basis, in spite of two differences: here on earth we know God only in the obscurity of faith, not in the evidence of vision, and although we hope to possess Him inamissibly some day, we can while on earth lose Him by mortal sin. In spite of these two differences relating to faith and hope, it is the same essentially supernatural life: sanctifying grace, received in the very essence of the soul, and infused charity, received in the will, should last forever, and with them the infused moral virtues and the seven gifts of the Holy Ghost. The summit of the normal development of the life of grace is, therefore, the beatific vision received after death. By way of conclusion, we shall briefly discuss this vision of heaven and its normal prelude on earth in the truly purified soul.

THE ABSOLUTELY IMMEDIATE VISION OF THE DIVINE ESSENCE

We shall sum up here what St. Thomas teaches on this point in the *Summa*.²⁸⁰⁰

If God had created us in a purely natural state with a mortal body and an immortal soul, but without the supernatural life of grace, even then our last end, our beatitude, would have consisted in knowing God and loving Him above all else, for our intellect is made to know the truth, and especially the supreme Truth, and our will is made to love and will good, and especially the sovereign Good.

If we had been created without the supernatural life of grace, the final reward of the just would have been to know God and to love Him, but they would have known Him only from without, so to speak, by the reflection of His perfections in creatures, as the greatest philosophers of antiquity knew Him. Without a doubt, we would have known Him in a more certain manner without admixture of errors, but by abstract knowledge, through the intermediary of things and of limited concepts in the mirror of creatures. We would have known God as the first cause of spirits and bodies, and we would have enumerated His infinite perfections known analogically by their reflection in the created order. Our ideas of the divine attributes would have remained, we have said, like squares of mosaic incapable of reproducing perfectly the spiritual physiognomy of God without hardening it. This abstract and mediate knowledge would have let many obscurities subsist, in particular in regard to the intimate harmonizing of the divine perfections. We would always have asked ourselves how infinite goodness and the divine permission of evil are able to harmonize, how infinite justice and infinite mercy can accord intimately. The human intellect would not have been able to forbear saying: If I could only see this God, who is the source of all truth and goodness, of the life of creatures, and of intellects and wills! This desire would have remained conditional and inefficacious if we had been created in a purely natural state.

But, in reality, the infinite mercy of God has raised us to supernatural life, whose full flowering is called not only the future life, but eternal life, because it is measured by the single instant of immobile eternity. Preaching the beatitudes at the very beginning of His ministry, our Lord tells us: “Be glad and rejoice, for your reward is very great in heaven.”²⁸⁰¹ To the Samaritan woman He says: “He that shall drink of the water that I will give him, shall not thirst forever; but the water that I will give him, shall become in him a fountain of water springing up into life everlasting.”²⁸⁰² In His sacerdotal prayer, Christ says: “Now this is eternal life: that they may know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom Thou hast sent.”²⁸⁰³ St. Paul explains this statement to us by saying: “We see now through a glass in a dark manner; but then face to face. Now I know in part; but then I shall know even as I am known.”²⁸⁰⁴ And St. John adds: “We shall be like to Him, because we shall see Him as He is.”²⁸⁰⁵

The Church has defined that this revealed doctrine means an immediate vision of the divine essence without the intermediary of any creature previously known.²⁸⁰⁶ In other words, by the gaze of our intellect supernaturally strengthened by the light of glory, we shall see God better than we see with our eyes of flesh the persons with whom we speak, for we shall see Him clearly as an object closer to us than we are to ourselves. Here on earth we know especially what God is not: we know that He is not material, changing, limited; we shall then see Him as He is in His Deity, in His infinite essence, in His intimate life common to the three Persons. Grace is a participation of this essence and life since it will give us to see Him thus immediately as He sees Himself, to love Him as He loves Himself, to live eternally by Him.

St. Thomas explains this revealed doctrine by stating²⁸⁰⁷ that between God and us there will not be even the intermediary of an idea, for no created idea can represent such as it is in itself, the pure, intellectual, eternally subsistent being that is God and His infinite truth, or His limitless love. We shall not be able to express our contemplation by any word, even by any interior word, just as a man is rendered incapable of speech when absorbed by the sight of a sublime and indescribable spectacle.

This immediate vision of the divine essence immensely surpasses all the created concepts of the divine perfections that we can have here on earth. We are called to see all the divine perfections intimately harmonized, identified in the eminence of the Deity, or the inner life of God; to see how the tenderest mercy and the most inflexible justice proceed from one and the same infinitely generous and infinitely holy love, from an eternal love of the supreme Good, which is, to be sure, intimately diffusive of self (the principle of mercy), but which also has a right to be loved above all (the principle of justice). We shall see how mercy and justice are united in all the works of God, how eternal love is identical with the sovereign good always loved, how divine wisdom is identical with the first truth always known, and how all these perfections harmonize and are but one in the very essence of Him who is.

We shall also see the infinite fecundity of the divine nature in the three divine Persons; the eternal generation of the Word, “splendor of the Father and figure of His substance.” We shall gaze upon the ineffable procession of the Holy Ghost, term of the common love of the Father and of the Son, the bond uniting Them eternally in the most absolute diffusion of Themselves. The supreme Being is essentially diffusive of Itself in the intimate life of God, and freely bestows Its riches by means of creation and by our gratuitous elevation to the life of grace. Thus will be verified St. Paul’s words: “Whom He foreknew, He also predestinated to be made conformable to the image of His Son; that He might be the first-born amongst many brothers.”²⁸⁰⁸ From all eternity God has an only Son to whom He communicates all His divine nature; He gives Him to be “God of God, light of light.” He has willed to have other sons, adopted sons, to whom He communicates a participation in His nature, sanctifying grace in the essence of their souls, and from this grace proceed in their higher faculties the light of glory and inamissible charity. Thus, St. Thomas says, “by the incarnation of the Son we receive adoptive sonship in the likeness of His natural sonship.”²⁸⁰⁹

We shall also contemplate immediately the intimate and indissoluble union of the person of the Word and of the humanity of the Savior. We shall see thereby all the splendor of the divine maternity of Mary, of her mediation, the price of the salvation of souls, and the unlimited riches of these words so quickly uttered: “The eternal life of the elect.”

No one can tell the joy that will be born in us of this absolutely immediate vision, which will be like a spiritual fusion of our soul, of our intellect, and of the divine essence, an uninterrupted transforming union, an intimate and perfect communion that nothing will ever be able to lessen. The love which will result from this vision will be so pure and strong a love of God that nothing will ever be able to diminish it. This love will be sovereignly spontaneous, but no longer free; it will be superior to liberty, ravished by the sovereign Good. By this love we shall rejoice especially that God is God, infinitely holy, just, and merciful; we shall adore all the decrees of His providence in view of the manifestation of His goodness, and we shall subordinate ourselves completely to Him. We shall enter into His beatitude, according to the words of our Savior in the parable of the talents: “Enter thou into the joy of thy Lord.”²⁸¹⁰

We can form some idea of the activity of the saints in heaven by the radiation of their lives on earth, such as it appears, for example, in our day in the numerous graces obtained through the intercession of Mary in the sanctuary at Lourdes, or through the prayer of a St. Teresa of Lisieux.

THE NORMAL AND IMMEDIATE PRELUDE OF THE BEATIFIC VISION

If sanctifying grace is the seed of eternal life in us, what follows as a result? First of all, that sanctifying grace, called “the grace of the virtues and the gifts,” is “much more excellent,” as St. Thomas says,²⁸¹¹ than the graces *gratis datae*, like the gift of miracles, that of tongues, or prophecy which announces a contingent event. These graces are, so to speak, exterior; they give us signs of the divine life, but they are not themselves the divine life shared in us.

Now, it is from the grace of the virtues and the gifts received by all at baptism, and not from graces *gratis datae* and extraordinary graces that, as we have seen, the infused contemplation of the mysteries of faith proceeds. This contemplation is an act of living faith, illumined by the gifts of understanding and wisdom. It is not, therefore, an essentially extraordinary favor like prophecy or the gift of tongues, but is found in the normal way of sanctity.

The truth of this conclusion becomes even more apparent if we observe that sanctifying grace, being essentially ordained to eternal life, is likewise ordained to the normal and immediate prelude of the beatific vision. Is not this prelude precisely the eminent exercise of infused faith illumined by the gifts of wisdom and understanding, that is, the infused contemplation of the divine goodness and its radiation, together with perfect charity and the ardent desire for the beatific vision? On earth this ardent desire is found in its full perfection only in the transforming union. Therefore this union does not appear to be outside the normal way of sanctity, especially if one considers, not so much a given individual soul, but the human soul and, in it, sanctifying grace considered in itself, as the seed of glory.

The ardent desire for God is only too rare on earth, even in consecrated souls; and yet if there is a good to which the Christian should ardently aspire, evidently it is the eternal possession of God. To attain it, he should desire an ever deeper faith, a firmer confidence, a purer and stronger love of God, virtues which are found precisely in the transforming union. Thus

this union appears, in profoundly humble and fully purified souls, as the immediate prelude of the beatific vision. There must, in fact, be some proportion between the intensity of the desire and the value of the good desired; in this case the value of the good being infinite, it could not be too greatly desired. Consequently it is not fitting that this infinite good should be granted to a soul that does not yet desire it ardently. The more purified the soul is, the more it aspires to the possession of God, and if at death the soul's desire is not as ardent as it should be, this is a sign that it needs additional purification, that of purgatory.

The dogma of purgatory, then, throws a new light on the present question. Purgatory is a punishment which supposes a sin that could have been avoided and an insufficient satisfaction that could have been complete if we had better accepted the trials of the present life. It is certain that no one will be detained in purgatory except for sins he could have avoided or for negligence in making reparation for them. Therefore normally we should, like the saints, undergo our purgatory in this life while meriting, while growing in love, instead of after death without meriting.

Therefore sanctifying grace, which is of itself ordained to eternal life, is also ordained to such perfection that the soul may receive the light of glory immediately after death without passing through purgatory. This disposition to enter heaven immediately after death supposes a complete purification, analogous at least to that of souls that are about to leave purgatory and have a very ardent desire for God. According to St. John of the Cross, this complete purification is normally found on earth only in those who have courageously endured the passive purifications of the senses and the spirit, which prepare the soul for intimate union with God.²⁸¹² This reason confirms all that we have said and shows that the passive purifications are indeed in the normal way of sanctity, like the close union with God for which they prepare. Evident also is the degree of sanctity in question in the expression "the normal way of sanctity"; that sanctity is meant which permits the soul to enter heaven immediately after death.

Such is, we believe, the teaching of St. John of the Cross, which admirably preserves and explains the traditional doctrine on this point, in particular that of the great spiritual writers who preceded him. To grasp the meaning and import of this teaching, souls must doubtless be considered not only as they are, but as they should be. Now, it is the work proper to spirituality to remind souls incessantly of what they should be that they may go beyond what they are.

This lofty doctrine also conforms perfectly to what St. Thomas tells us not only about the nature of grace, the seed of glory, but also about the beatitudes and the imitation of Jesus Christ,²⁸¹³ the virtues of the purified soul,²⁸¹⁴ the higher degree of humility,²⁸¹⁵ patience,²⁸¹⁶ the spirit of faith,²⁸¹⁷ confidence in God, and charity.²⁸¹⁸

St. Thomas, St. Albert the Great, St. Bonaventure, and after them St. John of the Cross and St. Francis de Sales²⁸¹⁹ found this teaching in the fathers who spoke of the relations of contemplation and perfect love, in St. Paul himself, and in the Gospel. St. Paul delights in saying: "That which is at present momentary and light of our tribulation [if it is well borne], worketh for us above measure exceedingly an eternal weight of glory."²⁸²⁰ He gives us the ardent desire for it by reminding us that we have received the "pledge of the Spirit,"²⁸²¹ or the pledge and foretaste of eternal life. And our Lord Himself says to us: "If any man thirst, let him come to Me, and drink.... Out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water."²⁸²² "He that hath My commandments and keepeth them; he it is that loveth Me. And he that loveth Me, shall be loved of My Father; and I will love him, and will manifest Myself to him."²⁸²³ This secret manifestation of Christ to the faithful soul is truly the prelude of eternal life; it is found especially in the highest of the eight beatitudes: "Blessed are the clean of heart: for they shall see God. Blessed are the peacemakers.... Blessed are they that suffer persecution for justice' sake."²⁸²⁴ These beatitudes are, says St. Thomas, the highest acts of the virtues and the gifts; there is in them "a kind of imperfect inchoation of future happiness."²⁸²⁵ Even here on earth, the fruits of these merits begin to appear, and they contain a savor of eternal life, or a foretaste of the joy of the elect.

ON THE NATURE OF SPIRITUAL THEOLOGY

We call attention to a good work by Father Gabriel of St. Magdalen, C.D., which appeared in the *Acta Academiae Romanae S. Thomae* (1939):- “De indole psychologica theologiae spiritualis.” This article, we believe, contains the most exact statement that has been made on this subject following two recent controversies: that between Father Stolz, O.S.B., and M. Penido on whether the psychological consideration of the facts of the interior life belongs to the domain of spiritual theology; and that between Jacques Maritain and Father T. Deman on the relation of spiritual theology with theology as such.

Father Gabriel answers these two questions as follows:

1. In reality spiritual theology as it exists today implies a psychological study of the facts of the interior life, but a study made in a manner notably different from that of St. Teresa, who is almost solely descriptive, and from that of St. John of the Cross, who interprets these facts theologically in order to show what the evolution of the life of grace in a completely faithful soul is and ought to be.
2. This psychological study may be scientific, and it becomes so when it establishes universal psychological laws, for example, on the relations of purifying aridity and union with God.
3. This study becomes theological when these laws find their superior basis in fixed theological principles. Such is the character of the psychological consideration of the spiritual life in the work of St. John of the Cross, in particular when he establishes the necessity of the passive purification of the senses and then that of the spirit to attain the intimate and perfect union with God, which is the culminating point of the evolution of the life of grace in perfect souls. (Thus fixed theological conclusions are reached.)
4. The psychological study of the facts of the life of the soul, although necessary even to moral theology in the tracts on human acts, the passions, the virtues in general and in particular, and the gifts of the Holy Ghost, is particularly requisite for spiritual theology, which considers the development of the interior life and its different phases even to perfect union. Consequently spiritual theology preserves the same concepts of grace, faith, confidence, charity, contemplation, and so on, as does moral theology, such as St. Thomas considers it. Nevertheless in spiritual theology these concepts are in closer relation with the concrete development of the interior life: for example, the concept of infused contemplation with the successive phases of the night of the senses, the night of the spirit, and perfect union. As a result we are led, not to admit a specific distinction between theology as conceived by St. Thomas and spiritual theology, but to see in the latter a function of theology, which, without being a science subordinated to theology, depends essentially on its principles.

Father Gabriel thus admits, as we do, that spiritual theology is an application of theology which determines the nature of the intimate union of the soul with God and the means (the acts, trials, graces) which lead to this union. It thus establishes, according to fixed theological principles, juxtaposed with the experience of the saints, the superior laws of the life of grace.

This is the point of view we took in the introduction and in the course of this work. Spiritual theology is, we said—designedly using a very general term—an application of theology, an application which is still in the domain of the universal, and on which depend the art of direction and the prudence of the director, which is the particular, contingent, and final application to a given person rather than to another.²⁸²⁶

We also stated that spiritual theology is a branch of theology, or one of its integral parts (*ratione materiae*);²⁸²⁷ but although it has a less extended domain than moral theology as conceived by St. Thomas, it is the highest of its applications or its branches, for its end is to lead souls to intimate union with God. By it theology returns to its point of departure, to its eminent source, to divine revelation contained in Scripture and tradition. Spiritual theology, as a matter of fact, studies what should be the infused contemplation of revealed mysteries and the divine union resulting from this contemplation. In a word, it shows what the normal prelude of eternal life should be. Thereby the cycle of sacred science is completed.

From this point of view, spiritual theology presumes a thoroughly profound knowledge of dogmatic theology and of moral theology, which are the two parts of a single science that is eminently speculative and practical, like “the impression of the science of God in us.”²⁸²⁸ Thereby the superior unity of theology is maintained, and we see ever better how it realizes what the Vatican Council says: “Reason also, illumined by faith, when it seeks zealously, piously, and soberly, attains through the gift of God some understanding of the mysteries, and that a most fruitful one, now from the analogy of those which it knows naturally, now from the interrelation of those mysteries with the ultimate end of man.”²⁸²⁹

(To be read from the bottom up)

Unitive life of the perfect	◇ full	◇ extraordinary, e.g., with the vision of the Blessed Trinity
	◇ weak	◇ ordinary <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • eminent contemplative form • apostolic form
	◇ initial	◇ not very continual union, often interrupted
Illuminative life of proficients	◇ full infused contemplation	◇ extraordinary or accompanied by visions, revelations
		◇ ordinary <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • clearly contemplative form • active form, or form ordained to action, e.g., gift of wisdom under practical form
	◇ weak	◇ transitory acts of infused contemplation (d. The Dark Night, Bk. I, chap. 9)
	◇ initial	◇ passive purification of the senses more or less well borne (initial infused contemplation)
Purgative life of beginners	◇ full or generous	◇ fervent souls pious and devout souls
	◇ weak	◇ tepid or retarded souls, not without relapses
	◇ initial	◇ first conversion or justification

THE END



Réginald Marie Garrigou-Lagrange, O.P. (February 21, 1877, Auch, France—February 15, 1964, Rome) was a Catholic theologian and is considered by some to be the greatest Catholic Thomist of the 20th century. He taught at the Pontifical University of St. Thomas Aquinas, commonly known as the Angelicum, in Rome from 1909 to 1960.

By 1917 a special professorship in ascetical and mystical theology was created for him at the Angelicum, the first of its kind anywhere in the world. His great achievement was to synthesise the highly abstract writings of St Thomas Aquinas with the experiential writings of St John of the Cross, showing how they are in perfect harmony with each other.

Father Garrigou-Lagrange, the leading proponent of “strict observance Thomism,” initially attracted attention when he wrote against the Modernist *Nouvelle Théologie* theological movement. He is also said to be the drafter or “ghostwriter” of Pope Pius XII’s 1950 encyclical *Humani Generis*, subtitled “Concerning Some False Opinions Threatening to Undermine the Foundations of Catholic Doctrine.”

He is best known for his spiritual theology. His magnum opus in the field is *The Three Ages of the Interior Life*, in which he propounded the thesis that infused contemplation and the resulting mystical life are in the normal way of holiness of Christian perfection. This influenced the section entitled “Chapter V: The Universal Call to Holiness in the Church” in the Second Vatican Council’s Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*.

He taught many eminent Catholic theologians during his academic career, the most illustrious being the future Pope John Paul II, whose encyclical *Fides et Ratio* is the mature fruit of his training under the learned Dominican. Fr. Garrigou-Lagrange is also known to have introduced Thomism to fellow theologian and priest Yves Congar.

The *Osservatore Romano*, Dec. 9–10, 1950 lists Garrigou-Lagrange among the names of the preparatory commission for the definition of the Assumption of Mary.

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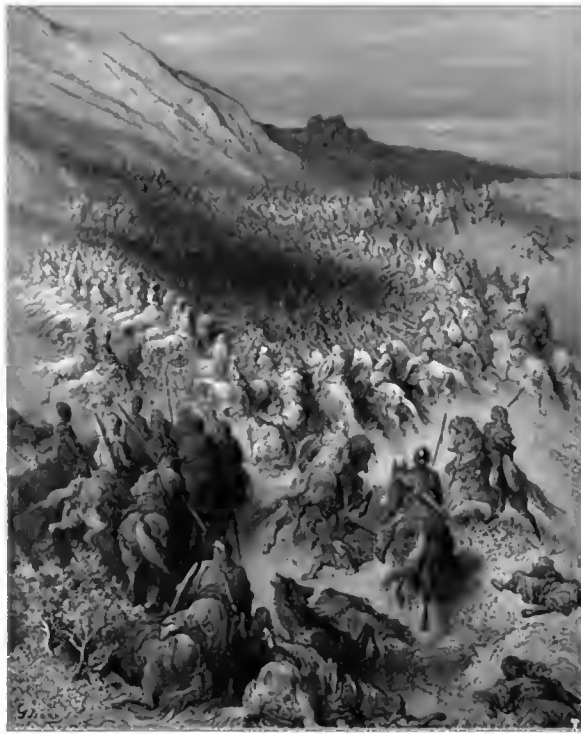


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¹ Bk. I, chaps. 8, 14.

² J. de Guibert, S.J., *Revue d'ascétique et de mystique*, July, 1924, p. 294. See also the same author's work: *Theologia spiritualis ascetica et mystica* (Rome, 1931), pp. 374–89. On page 381 of this work Father de Guibert concedes us a great deal in teaching: "Although generous souls may ordinarily seem not really to reach perfection unless God grants them some touches of or brief participations in those graces which constitute infused contemplation, properly so called, the way or state of infused contemplation is, nevertheless, not the only normal way to the perfection of charity; and therefore souls can ascend to any degree of sanctity if they go by this way in the habitual manner."

We do not say that the state of infused contemplation is the only normal way of sanctity, but that it is at the summit of the normal way of sanctity. We wish to show in the present work that there is a degree of perfection and also of reparatory life which remains inaccessible as a characterized state without the passive purifications of the senses arid spirit, properly so called.

In this teaching we differ from Father de Guibert, and we think that we follow the traditional doctrine of the great spiritual writers, notably St. John of the Cross, in the passage where he speaks of the necessity of these two passive purifications for removing the defects of beginners and those of proficients (cf. *The Dark Night*, Bk. I, chaps. 8 f.; Bk. II, chaps. 2 f.). Exterior sufferings are doubtless also very purifying, but, without the passive purifications, properly so called, they are not supported with all the perfection required. St. John of the Cross points out (ibid.) that if these purifications are undergone only at intervals, the soul does not reach the summit which he speaks of.

³ Nos. 1564, 1566.

⁴ Father Peeters expresses himself in like manner in the second revised and augmented edition of this same work (1931), pp 216–21.

⁵ This distinction explains, we believe, certain apparent contradictions in the writings of St. Teresa, which she herself has pointed out, saying that they are not real.

In many texts she speaks of the general call of interior souls to the living waters of prayer, and in other texts she speaks of particular cases. Thus she says in chapter 20 of *The Way of Perfection*: "The last chapter seems to contradict what I said when, to console those who were not contemplatives, I told them that God had made many ways of reaching Him, just as He has made 'many mansions.' "And she holds as a fact the principle of the general call, which she explains anew: "I repeat that His Majesty, being God, knows our weakness and has provided for us. He did not say: 'Let some men come to Me by some other means.' His mercy is so great that He hinders no one from drinking of the fountain of life.... Indeed, He calls us loudly and publicly to do so ('Jesus stood and cried, saying: If any man thirst, let him come to Me, and drink.' John 7:37).... You see, sisters, there is no fear you will die of drought on the way of prayer.... Then take my advice; do not loiter on the road, but struggle manfully until you perish in the attempt." The restrictions made by St. Teresa do not concern the general and remote call, but the individual and proximate call, as we have explained. Cf. *Christian Perfection and Contemplation*, pp. 345–81.

⁶ See IIa, IIae, q.180, a.6.

⁷ Luke 10:41.

⁸ Matt. 16::6.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Luke 10:41.

¹¹ Matt. 12:30.

¹² Ct. St. Thomas, Ia IIae, q.28, a.4 ad 2um; IIIa, q.23, a.1 ad 3um.

¹³ Matt. 6:33

¹⁴ Ps. 126:1.

¹⁵ Matt. 12:30.

¹⁶ This explains how St. Francis de Sales could set forth all that concerns ascetical and mystical theology under the title, *Treatise on the Love of God*.

¹⁷ We are speaking of doctrinal mystical theology. It should be remembered that in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries infused contemplation itself was sometimes called mystical theology.

¹⁸ In *Christian Perfection and Contemplation*, pp. 12–47, we dealt at greater length with the object and method of ascetical and mystical theology (the descriptive method, the deductive method, the union of the two), and we examined the position of the problem relative to the distinction between ascetical and mystical theology according to the texts of several ancient and modern writers.

¹⁹ We might also fail to distinguish sufficiently between the general and remote call and the individual and proximate call.

²⁰ Some authors, by thus proceeding too a priori, have maintained that the actual influence of the gifts of the Holy Ghost is necessary even for a feeble act (remissus) of the infused virtues; for example, for an act of faith in which there is as yet no penetration or any relish of the mystery in which one believes.

²¹ To settle the question whether it is legitimate humbly to desire the infused contemplation of the mysteries of faith and the union with God which results from it, manifestly it is not sufficient to know this contemplation and this union from the exterior by signs. We must know their nature, and also whether they are essentially extraordinary or something eminent but normal. The practically exclusive use of the descriptive method would lead us to consider this question of nature as almost inexplicable and one about which only few words are written at the end of a treatise. On the contrary, it is an Important question which should be treated *ex professo*.

²² The Dark Night of the Soul, Bk. I, chap. 8.

²³ Ibid., chap. 14.

²⁴ Prior to Vallgornera, Philip of the Blessed Trinity had affirmed this idea in the same terms in that part of his work in which he speaks of infused contemplation. This is the same teaching that is found also in the works of the Carmelites, Anthony of the Holy Ghost, Joseph of the Holy Ghost, and of many others whom we shall quote farther on when discussing this subject.

²⁵ *The Dark Night of the Soul*, Bk. II, chaps. 2, 11

²⁶ Another Dominican, Giovanni Maria di Lauro, in his *Theologia mystica* which appeared in Naples in 1743, divides his work in the same way, placing the passive purification of the senses as the transition to the illuminative way (p. 113), and the passive purification of the spirit as the disposition to the perfect unitive life (p. 303), according to the teaching of St. John of the Cross.

²⁷ Scaramelli, *Direttorio mistico*, tr. I, chap. I, no. 10.

²⁸ *Pratique de l'oraison mentale*, 2e traite: Oraison extraordinaire, 8e ed. Paris: G. Beauchesne, 1911.

²⁹ *Les phenomenes mystiques* (Traite de theologie mystique). Paris, 1920.

³⁰ *La spiritualite chretienne*. Cf. Introduction, pp. vi if.

³¹ *Evolucion mistica*. Salamanca, 19°8. Cuestiones misticas, 2nd. ed. Salamanca, 1920.

³² *La vie d'union a Dieu*, 3d ed., 1921; *Les degres de la vie spirituelle*, 2 vols., 5th ed., 1920; *L'etat mystique, sa nature, ses phases*, 2nd ed., 1921.

³³ *La contemplation* (principles of mystical theology). Paris, 1912.

³⁴ *L'oraison contemplative*. Paris: Beauchesne, 1921. See also Louis Peeters, S.J., *Vers l'union divine par les exercices de saint Ignace* (Museum Lessianum), 2nd ed., 1931.

³⁵ *La structure de l'ame et l'experience mystique*, 2 vols. Paris, 1927. See also the posthumous book of the same aUthor: *La vraie vie chretienne*. Paris, 1935.

³⁶ *La contemplation mystique d'apres St. Thomas d'Aquin*. Paris, 1923.

³⁷ *Memento de vie spirituelle*, 1923.

³⁸ Gabriel of St. Magdalen, O.C.D., "La contemplation acquise chez les theologiens carmes dechausses," an article which appeared in *La vie spirituelle*.

³⁹ Cf. "The Inquiry" on this point which appeared in the supplement of *La vie spirituelle* from September, 1929 to May, 1931. It will be of interest to read in particular the testimony of Fathers Marechal, S.J., Alb. Valensin, S.J., M. de la Taille, S.J., Cayre, Assumptionist, Jerome of the Mother of God, Carmelite, and Schryvers, Redemptorist.

⁴⁰ *Christian Perfection and Contemplation*, chaps. 1, 2, 4, a.3, 4; chap. 5, a. 3–5; chap. 6, a.I-5. *L'amour de Dieu et la croix de jesus*, 1929, Vol. II, Parts IV and V. *Les trois conversions et les trois voies*, 1932, chap. 4 and appendix.

⁴¹ See Ia IIae, q.68.

⁴² Ibid., a. 1,1,5.

⁴³ *The Dark Night of the Soul*, Bk. I, chap. 8.

⁴⁴ Ibid., chap. 14.

⁴⁵ *Treatise on the Love of God*, Bk. VI, chap. 3. "So it is with prayer; it is called meditation until it has produced the honey of devotion; after that it becomes contemplation." See the following chapters on contemplation.

⁴⁶ See IIIa, q.62, a.2: "Whether sacramental grace confers anything in addition to the grace of the virtues and gifts." In this article, St. Thomas states that habitual or sanctifying grace perfects the essence of the soul, and that the infused virtues (theological and moral) and the seven gifts of the Holy Ghost spring from it in the faculties.

⁴⁷ St. Teresa, Life, chap. 31, par. 11

⁴⁸ From this point of view, which is ours, mystical theology, properly so called, begins with the age of proficients when the three signs of the passive purification of the senses appear, as noted by St. John of the Cross (*The Dark Night of the Soul*, Bk. I, chap. 9). Infused contemplation of the mysteries of salvation, contemplation which leads to close union with God, begins then in prolonged aridity, accompanied by true generosity. We shall see that these three signs of the passive purification of the senses are: (1) prolonged sensible aridity; (²) a keen desire for perfection and for God; (³) a quasi-inability to apply oneself to discursive meditation and the inclination to consider God by a simple gaze with loving attention. These three signs must exist together; one alone would not suffice.

⁴⁹ See IIa IIae, q.46.

⁵⁰ See *ibid.*, q. 184, a.3.

⁵¹ Cf. *Perfection chretienne et contemplation*, II, 662–769.

⁵² Third edition, Paris, Amat, 1921. (Les Peres grecs, les Peres latins, la doctrine mystique au XIIe, au XIIIe, au XIVe, au XVIe, au XVIIe, siecle et depuis lors.)

⁵³ Desclee, Paris, 1930, 2 vols. (*Histoire et doctrines des Peres et Docteurs de l'Eglise.*)

⁵⁴ *Ibid.* See the analytical table in volumes I and 2 of this work and also II, chap. 20, p. 3.

⁵⁵ See Ia IIae, q. 1 13, a.9 ad 2um.

⁵⁶ At the beginning of a treatise on the interior life, it is important to get a high idea of sanctifying grace; Protestantism, following several nominalists of the fourteenth century, has lost the conception of it. In Luther's opinion, man is justified not by a new infused life, but by the exterior imputation of the merits of Christ, in such a way that he is not interiorly changed and that it is not necessary for his salvation that he observe the precept of the love of God above all else. Such an opinion is a radical misconception of the interior life spoken of in the Gospel. This lamentable doctrine was prepared by that of the nominalists, who said that grace is a gift which is not essentially supernatural, but which morally gives a right to eternal life, like paper money which, though only paper, gives a right, by reason of a legal institution, to receive money. This doctrine constituted the negation of the essentially supernatural life; it was a failure to recognize the very essence of grace and of the theological virtues.

⁵⁷ Even in the *Phaedon*, the future is thus represented.

⁵⁸ Matt. 7: 14.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 19: 17.

⁶⁰ John 5:24; 6:40, 47, 55.

⁶¹ Matt. 5:3–8.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 5: 12.

⁶³ John 17: 1–3.

⁶⁴ See I John 3:2.

⁶⁵ See I Cor. 13: 12.

⁶⁶ St. Thomas, Ia, q.12, a.2.

⁶⁷ Matt. 25:21, 23.

⁶⁸ St. Thomas, Ia, q.12, a.4.

⁶⁹ John 4: 10–14.

⁷⁰ *Commentum in Joannem*, 4:3 ff.

⁷¹ John 7:37 f.

⁷² John 3:36; 5:24, 39; 6:40,47,55.

⁷³ John 6: 55.

⁷⁴ Luke 17:20f.

⁷⁵ See I John 3: 14 f.

- ⁷⁶ Ibid., 5: 13.
- ⁷⁷ John 8: 51.
- ⁷⁸ See IIa IIae, q. 24, a. 3 ad 2um; Ia IIae, q.69, a.2; *De veritate*, q. 14, a.2.
- ⁷⁹ *Meditations sur l'evangile*, Part II, 37th day, in Joan. 17: 3.
- ⁸⁰ See Ia IIae, q. I 13, a.9 ad 2um.
- ⁸¹ Ibid., q. II I, a. 5: “Gratia gratum faciens is much more excellent than gratia gratis data”; in other words, sanctifying grace, which unites us to God Himself, is very much superior to prophecy, to miracles, and to all the signs of divine intervention.
- ⁸² John 4: 10–14.
- ⁸³ See I Cor. 12:28 ff.; 13:1 ff.
- ⁸⁴ Cf. Ia IIae, q. III, a.5: “*Gratia gratum faciens* is much more excellent than *gratia gratis data*.”
- ⁸⁵ See IIIa, q.62, a. 1.
- ⁸⁶ See II Cor. 5:6.
- ⁸⁷ St. Thomas gives a good explanation of this keen desire for God which the souls in purgatory have. (We shall return to this point later on when we speak of the passive purifications.) Cf. IV Sent., d.21, a.1 ad quaestionem 3am. “The more a thing is desired, just so much the more is its absence painful. And because the love, by which the highest good is desired after this life, is most intense in holy souls, because love is not held back by the weight of the body, and also, because the time of enjoying the highest Good has now come, unless something impedes it, for the very same reason they suffer to a great degree from the delay.” Thus we would suffer greatly from hunger if deprived of food for more than a day, when it would be in the radical order of our organism to restore itself. It is radical to the order of the life of the soul, in the actual economy of salvation, to possess God immediately after death. Far from being essentially extraordinary, this is the normal way, as we see it in the lives of the saints.
- ⁸⁸ See II Cor. 4: 16 ff.; 5: 1 ff.
- ⁸⁹ See IIa IIae, q.25, a.7: Whether Sinners Love Themselves. “Since the wicked do not know themselves aright, they do not love themselves aright, but love what they think themselves to be. But the good know themselves truly, and therefore truly love themselves... as to the inward man... and they take pleasure in entering into their own hearts.... On the other hand, the wicked have no wish to be preserved in the integrity of the inward man, nor do they desire spiritual goods for him, nor do they work for that end, nor do they take pleasure in their own company by entering into their own hearts, because whatever they find there, present, past, and future, is evil and horrible; nor do they agree with themselves, on account of the gnawings of conscience.”
- ⁹⁰ *The Confessions*, Bk. I, chap. I. “Our heart is restless, until it repose in Thee.” This is the proof for the existence of God through natural desire for true and lasting happiness, which can be found only in the Sovereign Good, known at least imperfectly and loved above all, and more than ourselves. We develop this proof in *La Providence et la confiance en Dieu*, pp. 50–64.
- ⁹¹ See I Cor. 2:11
- ⁹² Rom. 7:21–13.
- ⁹³ See II Cor. 4: 16.
- ⁹⁴ Ps. 42:4.
- ⁹⁵ Col. 3:9–11
- ⁹⁶ Eph. 3: 14–19
- ⁹⁷ Ibid., 4:23 f.; 5:2.
- ⁹⁸ The author of *The Imitation of Christ*, beginning with the first chapter of Book I, explains well the nature of the interior life when he says: “The teaching of Christ surpasseth all the teachings of the saints; and he that hath His Spirit, will find therein a hidden manna. But it happeneth that many, from the frequent hearing of the Gospel, feel little emotion, because they have not the Spirit of Christ. But he that would fully and with relish understand the words of Christ must study to conform his whole life to His.”
- ⁹⁹ Phil. 3:20.
- ¹⁰⁰ He does so in particular in two important chapters of the *Contra Gentes* (IV, 21, 22) on the effects and the signs of the indwelling of the Blessed Trinity in us.

At the beginning of chapter 22 he writes: “To converse with one’s friend is the highest characteristic of friendship. Moreover, man’s conversation with God is by contemplation of Him, as the Apostle used to say: ‘Our conversation is in heaven’ (Phil. 3: 20). Therefore, because the Holy Spirit makes us lovers of God, it follows that by the Holy Spirit we are constituted contemplators of God: whence the Apostle says: ‘But we all beholding the glory of the Lord with open face are transformed into the

same image from glory to glory, as by the Spirit of the Lord” (II Cor. 3: 18).

Those who meditate on chapters 21 and 22 of Book IV of the *Contra Gentes* will be able to get a clear idea as to whether or not, in the opinion of St. Thomas, the infused contemplation of the mysteries of faith is in the normal way of sanctity.

¹⁰¹ John 14:26.

¹⁰² St. Francis de Sales remarks somewhere in his writings that on the one hand as a man grows up he should be self-sufficient and depend less and less on his mother, who becomes less necessary to him when he reaches manhood, and especially when he reaches full maturity; on the contrary, as the interior man grows, he becomes daily more aware of his divine sonship, which makes him the child of God, and he becomes more and more a child in regard to God, even to the extent of re-entering, so to speak, the bosom of God. The blessed in heaven are always in this bosom of God.

¹⁰³ To know and to will, the human soul and the angel need two faculties; in this respect both differ from God. God, who is Being itself, Thought, Wisdom, and Love, does not need faculties to know and to love. On the contrary, since the angel and the soul are not being itself, they have only a nature or an essence capable of receiving existence. Moreover, in them restricted existence, which is proper to them, is distinct from acts of knowledge and of will which have an object that is not limited; as a result the essence of the soul or of the angel, which receives the existence that is proper to them, is distinct from the faculties or powers capable of producing, not the permanent act of existence, but the successive acts of knowledge and of will. Cf. St. Thomas, Ia, q. 54, a. 1–3.

¹⁰⁴ Thus a peasant who only very confusedly grasps intelligible reality, which is the object of philosophy, has, nevertheless, an intellect of the same nature as that of the philosopher; but neither one nor the other can by the sole natural powers of his reason know the intimate life of God.

¹⁰⁵ Summa, Ia, q. 12, a.4.

¹⁰⁶ See I Cor. 1:11.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.,2:9f.

¹⁰⁸ The sensible miracle of the resurrection of a body restores natural life to the body in a supernatural manner; whereas sanctifying grace, which resuscitates a soul, is an essentially supernatural life. The miraculous effect of the corporal resurrection is not supernatural in itself but only by the mode of its production, “non quoad essentiam, sed quoad modum productionis suae.” This is why a miracle, although supernatural by reason of its cause, is naturally knowable, whereas the essentially supernatural life of grace could not be known naturally. To mark this difference a miracle is often said to be preternatural rather than supernatural, and the latter word is reserved to designate the supernatural life.

¹⁰⁹ See Ia IIae, q.63, a.3.

¹¹⁰ Summa, IIa IIae.

¹¹¹ See ibid., q. 141, a.1 ad 3um: “Temperance also has a corresponding gift, namely, fear, whereby man is withheld from the pleasures of the flesh, according to Ps. 118: 120: ‘Pierce Thou my flesh with Thy fear.’... It also corresponds to the virtue of hope.”

¹¹² See ibid., q.9, a.4.

¹¹³ See Ia IIae, q.62, a.1 f.

¹¹⁴ Eph. 2:8.

¹¹⁵ Rom. 4: 1–25. Abraham was justified by faith in God, “it was reputed to him unto justice.” We ourselves will obtain salvation only by faith, which is a gift of God, by faith in Jesus Christ.

¹¹⁶ Cf. Denzinger, *Enchiridion*, no. 178.

¹¹⁷ St. Thomas, IIa IIae, q.6, a. 1, 2. As the virtues are specified by their object and their formal motive, this essentially supernatural character of infused faith depends on its first object and on its formal motive, which are inaccessible to all natural knowledge. The first object of faith is, in fact, God Himself in His intimate life, and the formal motive of infused faith is the authority of God revealing. Now we can by reason alone know the authority of God the Author of nature, and even the Author of the sensible miracle; but we cannot by reason alone adhere to the authority of God the Author of grace. It is as the Author of grace that God intervenes when He reveals to us the essentially supernatural mysteries of the Trinity, the Incarnation, the redemption, the Eucharist, and eternal life. We have treated this important point at length in *De revelatione*, I, chap. 14, pp’ 458–514, and in *Christian Perfection and Contemplation*, pp. 61–80.

¹¹⁸ H. Lacordaire, *Conferences a Notre-Dame de Paris*, 17th conference.

¹¹⁹ Cf. Denzinger, *Enchiridion*, no. 179. Acquired faith exists in the demons who have lost infused faith, but who believe as it were reluctantly because of the evidence of miracles and other signs of revelation. Cf. St. Thomas, IIa IIae, q.5, a.2; *De veritate*, q. 14, a.9 ad 4um.

¹²⁰ See I John 5: 10.

¹²¹ St. Thomas says the same thing in *De veritate*, q.14, a.2: “Eternal life consists in the full knowledge of God. Hence there should be in us some beginning of this supernatural knowledge; and this is through faith, which from an infused light believes things that exceed natural reason” *Summa*, IIa IIae, q.6, a.1, 2: Doubtless the light of faith is still obscure, but it is transluminously obscure, that is, superior and not inferior to the evidences of reason.

¹²² Lacordaire, loco cit.

¹²³ See Ia IIae, q.62, a.4

¹²⁴ See I Cor. 13:8,13

¹²⁵ See Ia IIae, q.63, a.4.

¹²⁶ Nevertheless these persons, being in the state of grace, do have the infused moral virtues always united to charity, but their attention is not sufficiently focused on them, and they have the corresponding acquired virtues only in a feeble degree.

¹²⁷ See Ia IIae, q.65, a.2. Thomists generally admit this proposition: "Without charity there can be true acquired moral virtues, but imperfect ones, as there were actually in many peoples." Cf. John of St. Thomas, *Cursus theol.*, De proprietate virtutum, disp. XVII, a. 2, nos. 6, 8, 10, 11, 14. Salmanticenses, *Cursus theol.*, De virtutibus, disp. IV, dub. I, no. I; dub. 2, nos. 26, 27. Billuart, *Cursus theol.*, De passionibus et virtutibus, diss. II, a.4, par. 3, especially *in fine*.

We treated this subject at greater length in the *Revue Thomiste*, July, 1937: "The instability of the acquired moral virtues in the state of mortal sin." Consult in particular St. Thomas, Ia IIae, q.49, a.2 ad 3 um; this text is of primary importance.

¹²⁸ See Ia IIae, q.65, a.2. In the present state of humanity, every man is either the state of mortal sin or in the state of grace. Since the Fall, man cannot, in fact, efficaciously love God the Author of his nature more than himself without healing grace, a grace which is not really distinct from sanctifying grace which elevates. Cf. St. Thomas, Ia IIae, q. 109, a.3.

¹²⁹ Clement V at the Council of Vienne (Denzinger, Enchiridion, no. 483), thus settled this question, which was formulated under Innocent III (Denzinger, no. 410): "Whether faith, charity, and the other virtues are infused into children in baptism." He answers: "We, however, considering the general efficacy of the death of Christ, which is applied by baptism equally to all the baptized, think that, with the approval of the sacred Council, we should choose as more probable and more consonant and harmonious with the teachings of the saints and of modern doctors of theology, the second opinion, which declares that informing grace and the virtues are bestowed in baptism on infants as well as adults." By these words, "and the virtues," Clement V means not only the theological virtues, but the moral virtues, for they also were involved in the question formulated under Innocent III.

¹³⁰ See Ia IIae, q.63, a.3.

¹³¹ Ibid., a.4.

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ See I Cor. 9:27.

¹³⁴ Eph. 2:19.

¹³⁵ See Ia IIae, q.65, a. 3.

¹³⁶ Cf. St. Thomas, *Quaest. disp.*: De virtutibus in communi, a. 10, in corp., ad 1 um, ad 13 um, ad 16um; also P. Bernard, O.P., *La vie spirituelle*, January, 1935; suppl., pp. 25-54: "La vertu acquise et la vertu infuse."

¹³⁷ Hence it follows that this penitent has through experience a much greater knowledge of the obstacles to be conquered than of the infused virtue of temperance, which he has just received, and which is of too elevated an order to fall under the scope of sensible experience.

¹³⁸ Infused temperance can exist without acquired temperance, as in the case we have just discussed. And inversely, acquired temperance can exist without the infused virtue, for the latter is lost after every mortal sin, whereas acquired temperance remains at least in an imperfect state (in statu dispositionis facile mobilis) if it existed before this sin. Thus the sensible memory, which is at the service of intellectual knowledge, can exist without it; inversely, a great scholar, preserving his knowledge in his intellect, can, by reason of a cerebral lesion, lose his memory which facilitated the exercise of this knowledge.

¹³⁹ In the just man, charity commands or inspires the act of acquired temperance by the intermediary of the simultaneous act of infused temperance. And even outside the production of their acts, since these two virtues are united in the same faculty, the infused confirms the acquired. Only in those Christians who live a more supernatural life, does the supernatural motive most appear as the explicit motive of acting; in others it is a rational motive, and the supernatural remains somewhat latent (remissus). Similarly, one pianist may show great technique and a modicum of inspiration, whereas in another the inverse may be true. The motives of inferior reason, which touch on health, are more or less explicit according as a person is more or less freed from these preoccupations, or according as he is so healthy that he need not think of his health.

¹⁴⁰ See IIa IIae, q.81.

¹⁴¹ See III q.85.

¹⁴² See IIa IIae, q. 157.

¹⁴³ Ibid., q. 151, 152.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., q. 161.

¹⁴⁵ Jas. 4:6.

¹⁴⁶ Matt. II: 19.

¹⁴⁷ See Ia IIae, q.66, a.2. These virtues grow together with charity because of their connection with this virtue, just as the different parts of our physical organism grow simultaneously. But the infused moral virtues grow especially with charity. The acquired virtues may not develop as much if they are not sufficiently exercised.

¹⁴⁸ The Hebrew text does not mention the gift of piety, but the Septuagint and the Vulgate do. Since the third century, tradition affirms this sevenfold number. Moreover, in the Hebrew text of Isaias, fear is named a second time in verse 3, and in the Old Testament the terms “fear of God” and “piety” have almost the same meaning.

¹⁴⁹ Wisd. 7:7–28.

¹⁵⁰ John 14: 15–26..

¹⁵¹ See I John 2:20, 27.

¹⁵² St. Thomas quotes these texts when he treats of each of the seven gifts.

¹⁵³ A. Gardeil, D.P., “Dons du Saint-Esprit,” *Dictionnaire de theologie catholique*, IV, 1728–81.

¹⁵⁴ Denzinger, *Enchiridion*, no. 83.

¹⁵⁵ *De sermone Domini*, I, 1–4; *De doctrina christiana*, II, 7; Sermo 347.

¹⁵⁶ Cf. *De Trinitate*, I, 12–14.

¹⁵⁷ Cf. Fulbert Cayre, A.A., *La contemplation augustinienne*, chaps. 2 f. He shows here that contemplation, according to St. Augustine, is a supernatural wisdom. It has for its principle, together with faith, a superior action of the Holy Ghost, which makes the soul, so to speak, touch and taste God.

¹⁵⁸ Council of Trent, Sess. VI, chap. 7.

¹⁵⁹ *Catechism of the Council of Trent*, Part I, chap. 9, § 3: “I believe in the Holy Ghost.”

¹⁶⁰ Rom. 8: 16.

¹⁶¹ Cf. St. Thomas, *In Ep. ad Rom.*, 8: 1

¹⁶² The composer of this beautiful prayer, which will be said until the end of the world, must have been a great contemplative. It is useless to know his name; he was a voice of God.

¹⁶³ Encyclical *Divinum illud munus* (May 9, 1897), circa finem. This text shows: (1) the necessity of the gifts (“has need of”); (2) their nature: they make us docile to the Holy Ghost; (3) their effects: they can lead us to the summit of sanctity.

¹⁶⁴ Cf. St. Thomas, *In III Sent.*, dist. 34 f.; Ia IIae, q.68; IIa IIae, q.8, 9, 19, 45, 52, 121, 139; see his commentators, especially Cajetan and John of St. Thomas, on Ia IIae, q.68. St. Bonaventure may also be consulted with profit. His doctrine differs on certain secondary points from that of St. Thomas; cf. Breviloquium, Part V, chaps. 5 f., and J. Fr. Bonnefoy, *Le Saint-Esprit et ses dons selon saint Bonaventure* (Paris: Vrin, 1929), and also art. “Bonaventure,” *Dict. de spiritualite*.

See also Dionysius the Carthusian, *De donis Spiritus Sancti* (an excellent treatise); J. B. de Saint-Jure, S.J., *L'homme spirituel*, Part I, chap. 4, “Des sept dons ”; L. Lallemant, S.J., *La doctrine spirituelle*, 4th principle, “La docilité a la conduite du Saint-Esprit.” B. Froget, O.P., *De l'habitation du Saint-Esprit dans les ames justes* (Paris, 1900), pp. 378–424. A. Gardeil, O.P., “Dons du Saint-Esprit,” *Dict. de theol. cathol.*, IV, 1728–81; *La structure de l'ame et l'experience mystique* (Paris, 1927), II, 192–281; *Les dons du Saint-Esprit dans les saint dominicains* (the introduction particularly), 1903. See several other articles on various gifts in particular by the same theologian in *La vie spirituelle*, 1932, 1933. D. Joret, O.P., *La contemplation mystique d'apres saint Thomas d'Aquin*, 1927, pp. 30–62.

We have also treated this important subject at length in *Christian Perfection and Contemplation*, chap 5, a.5 f., pp. 271–331. See also *La vie spirituelle*, November 19, 1932, suppl.: “Les dons ont-ils un mode humain”; *ibid.*, October, 1933, suppl.: “A propos du mode supra-humain des dons du Saint-Es prit,” reproduced in this book, *infra*, pp. 78–88.

¹⁶⁵ In the supernatural order, it is a question of reason enlightened by faith. It is thus, in particular, that infused prudence directs the infused moral virtues.

¹⁶⁶ “Secundum ea homo disponitur, ut efficiatur prompte mobilis ab inspira tione divina.”

¹⁶⁷ See Ia IIae, q.68, a. 1.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, a. 3, and *III Sent.* D. XXXIV, q. I, a. I.

¹⁶⁹ See Ia IIae, q.68, a. 3: “The gifts of the Holy Ghost are habits whereby man is perfected to obey readily the Holy Ghost.” Cf. *ibid.*, q.70, a.2: “The beatitudes are none but perfect works, which, by reason of their perfection, are assigned to the gifts rather than to the virtues.”

¹⁷⁰ John 3:8.

¹⁷¹ St. Thomas, *In Joannem*, 3:8.

¹⁷² This principle, contained in the commentary of St. Thomas on the Sentences and in his Summa, marks the continuity of these two works. Cf. III,D. XXXIV, q.2, a.1, qc.3; q.3, a.1, qc.1; and Ia IIae, q.68, a.1, a.2 ad rum. See also *Perfection chretienne et contemplation*, 7th ed., II, [52]-[64J.

¹⁷³ See Ia IIae, q.52, a. 1 ad lum.

¹⁷⁴ Matt. 10: 19.

¹⁷⁵ Other serious difficulties would follow the negation of the specific distinction between the virtues and the gifts. We could not explain why certain gifts, such as fear, are not numbered among the virtues, or why Christ had the seven gifts, as Isaiahs teaches us (II: 2 f.), without having certain infused virtues, such as faith, hope, and penance, which suppose an imperfection.

¹⁷⁶ See Ia IIae, q.68, a.2.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.

¹⁷⁸ The gift of wisdom makes this possible.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., a.2 ad 3um.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., ad 2um. Some theologians, as Abbe Perriot (*Ami du clerge*, 1891, p. 391), basing their argument on the text of St. Thomas that we have just quoted, have thought that in his opinion the gifts intervene in every meritorious work. Father Froget, O.P. (*De l'habitation du Saint-Esprit dans les ames justes*, Part IV, chap. 6, pp. 4⁹⁷-14) and Father Gardeil, O.P. (*Dict. theol. cath.*, art. "Dons," col. 1779) have shown that this is not at all the true thought of St. Thomas. To say that the gifts of the Holy Ghost must intervene in every meritorious act, even though it be imperfect (remissus et quantumvis remissus), would be to confound ordinary actual grace with the special inspiration to which the gifts render us docile. In the text which we have just quoted, St. Thomas means that man is not perfected to such a degree by the theological virtues that he does not always need to be inspired by the interior Master (semper not pro-semper), as we say: "I always need this hat," not however from morning until night, or from night until morning. Similarly a medical student not so well instructed that he does not always need the assistance of his master for certain operations. The need we experience is not transitory but permanent; all of which goes to show that the gifts should be not transitory inspirations, like the grace of prophecy, but permanent infused dispositions.

Moreover, it is certain that man can make a supernatural act of faith with a actual grace, without any assistance from the gifts of the Holy Ghost, without penetrating or tasting the mysteries to which he adheres. This is the case with the believer who is in the state of mortal sin, and who, on losing charity, has lost the seven gifts.

But, on the other hand, it is commonly admitted that the gifts of the Holy Ghost frequently influence us in a latent manner without our being aware of it, in order to give our meritorious acts a perfection which they would not have without this influence. In like manner, a favorable breeze facilitates the work of the rowers.

As S. Thomas teaches, Ia IIae, q.68, a.8, the gifts are in this way superior to the used moral virtues. Although the gifts are less elevated than the theological virtues, they bring them an added perfection, that, for example, of penetrating and delighting in the mysteries of faith.

¹⁸¹ See Ia IIae, q.68, a.3.

¹⁸² John of St. Thomas, De donis, Disp. 18, a.z, no. 3 I.

¹⁸³ St. Thomas (Ia IIae, q.68, a.3) and his commentators, in particular John of St. Thomas, show clearly that it is highly fitting that the gifts should be permanent dispositions in us (habitus) in order to render us habitually docile to the Holy Ghost, who always remains in the just soul, as the moral virtues are permanent dispositions to render the will and the sensible part of the soul habitually docile to the direction of right reason.

If it were otherwise, the organism of the life of grace, which is the greatest of the gifts of God, would remain imperfect. It is not fitting that, according to the plan of Providence, which disposes all things suaviter et fortiter, the organism of the supernatural life in the just soul should be in this respect less perfect than that of the acquired virtues directed by reason. Finally, according to tradition, habitual grace is called "the grace of the virtues and gifts." Cf. St. Thomas, IIIa, q.62, a.2.

¹⁸⁴ See Ia IIae, q.68, a.4, and Ia IIae, q.8, a.6.

¹⁸⁵ See Ia IIae, q. 141, a. 1 ad 3um.

¹⁸⁶ See Ia IIae, q.69, a.3, c. and ad 3um; Ia IIae, q.8, a.7; q.9, a.4; q.45, a.6; q.19,a.12; q.121, a.2; q.139,a.2.

Following St. Augustine, St. Thomas shows that the gift of wisdom corresponds to the beatitude of the peacemakers, for it gives peace and allows the soul possessing it to give it to others, at times even to the most troubled. The gift of understanding corresponds to the beatitude of the clean of heart; for those who possess this cleanness of heart begin here on earth, in a certain way, to see God in all that happens to us. The gift of knowledge, which shows us the gravity of sin, corresponds to the beatitude of those who weep for their sins. The gift of counsel, which inclines the soul to mercy, corresponds to the beatitude of the merciful. The gift of piety, which makes us see in men not rivals, but children of God and our brothers, corresponds to the beatitude of the meek. The gift of fortitude corresponds to that of those who hunger and thirst after justice and never become discouraged. Finally, the gift of fear corresponds to the beatitude of the poor in spirit; they possess the holy fear of the Lord, which is the beginning of wisdom.

¹⁸⁷ See IIIa, q.62, a. 2: "Whether sacramental grace confers anything in addition to the grace of the virtues and gifts." St. Thomas says here that habitual grace is so called because from it proceed the infused virtues and the gifts, as so many functions of the same organism.

¹⁸⁸ See Ia IIae, q.66, a.1.

¹⁸⁹ Pursuing the comparison we have already used, we note that among sailing vessels equally responsive to the wind, the brig differs from the schooner; the form and arrangement of the sails vary; certain places one type of sail is better than another. Something similar is found in the order of spiritual navigation toward the port of salvation.

¹⁹⁰ Cf. infra, Part III, chap. 23.

¹⁹¹ See Ia IIae, q. III, a.5: “Whether *gratia gratum faciens* is nobler than *gratia gratis data*.” St. Thomas answers with St. Paul (I Cor. 13: 1) that sanctifying grace, which is inseparable from charity, is far more excellent than graces *gratis datae*.

¹⁹² The theological virtues, which unite us to the Holy Ghost, are superior to the seven gifts, although they receive a new perfection from the gifts; thus a tree is more perfect than its fruit. These virtues are the rule of the gifts, in the sense that the gifts make us penetrate more deeply and taste with greater delight the mysteries to which we adhere by faith; but the immediate rule of the act of the gifts is the special inspiration of the Holy Ghost.

¹⁹³ Cf. *Christian Perfection and Contemplation*, pp. 272–77, 324 ff.

¹⁹⁴ P. Chrysogonus, O.C.D., *La perfection et la mystique selon les principes de saint Thomas*, Bruges, 1931.

¹⁹⁵ Cf. *La Vie spirituelle*, November, 1931, suppl., pp. (77) ff.

¹⁹⁶ *Quaestio unica de virtutibus cardinalibus*, a.4: “Utrum virtutes cardinales maneat in patria.”

¹⁹⁷ *Quaestio unica de virtutibus cardinalibus*, a.4, in corp.

¹⁹⁸ Cf. *Christian Perfection and Contemplation*, pp. 282–85; 324 ff.; 328.

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 320 ff.

²⁰⁰ See IIa IIae, q.171, a.5. Cf. *ibid.*, q.173, a.4, where St. Thomas gives the example of Caiphas, who prophesied without knowing that he did so.

²⁰¹ John 3:8.

²⁰² Bk. II, chap. 14.

²⁰³ Bk. III, chap. I; *ibid.*, chaps. 2 f.

²⁰⁴ *The Interior Castle*, seventh mansion, chap. 2.

²⁰⁵ *Summa*, IIIa, q.87, a.1 ad 1um.

²⁰⁶ See IIa IIae, q. 184, a.2.

²⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, ad 1um.

²⁰⁸ These last texts quoted from St. Thomas demonstrate, in spite of what may have been occasionally said on the subject, that he would by no means condemn the teaching of spiritual writers in regard to the mortification of activity that is called “natural,” that is, not sanctified, which develops to the detriment of the life of grace. St. Thomas insists here that in order to reach perfection one should will to exclude “whatever hinders the mind’s affections from tending wholly to God.” If a person does not oblige himself by vow to practice the three evangelical counsels, he ought at least to have the spirit of these counsels in order to be perfect (IIa IIae, q. 184, a. 3) To attain this end, it is thus recommended that a person should not be too much concerned with earthly things, but should use the goods of this world as though not using them. In this renunciation there is evidently a progress even in those who are already perfect.

²⁰⁹ See Ia IIae, q.68, a.2.

²¹⁰ *Ibid.*, ad 3um.

²¹¹ We treated this subject at considerable length in *L’amour de Dieu et la croix de Jesus*, II, 597–632; “The Passive Purification of Hope and of Charity.”

²¹² *Life*, chap. 31, sect. 21.

²¹³ *The Dark Night of the Soul*, Bk. I, chap. 8.

²¹⁴ *Ibid.*, Bk. II, chap. 14.

²¹⁵ *Summa theol. myst.* (ed. 1874), II, 299; III, 43.

²¹⁶ *Directorium mysticum* (ed. 1733), tr. III, disp. III, sect. IV; tr. IV, disp. I, sect. VI.

²¹⁷ *Cursus theol. scol. myst.*, II, II Praed., disp. XI, q. 11, nos. 18, 23.

²¹⁸ Ibid., disp. VIII.

²¹⁹ Acts 17:27f.

²²⁰ Cf. The Council of Orange (Denzinger, *Enchiridion*, nos. 176–200) and also St. Thomas, Ia IIae, q.109.

²²¹ John 15:5.

²²² See II Cor. 3:5.

²²³ Phil. 3:13.

²²⁴ Denzinger, nos. 182–200 and 141.

²²⁵ Matt. 7:7 f.

²²⁶ Ibid., 26:41.

²²⁷ Summa, IIa IIae, q.83, a.2, c. and ad 3um.

²²⁸ Session VI, chap. II (Denzinger,804)

²²⁹ Catechism of the Council of Trent, Part IV, chap. I, no. 3.

²³⁰ John 4: 10.

²³¹ Gal. 2:20.

²³² Sometimes a very elevated luminous grace gives the impression of obscurity: the obscurity is transluminous, like the excessively strong light of the sun which dazzles the weak eyes of an owl.

²³³ Many of these graces are not felt at all when received; they are of an entirely spiritual and supernatural order and consequently surpass our natural means of knowledge. Some of them are felt by reason of the repercussion they have on our sensibility, for example, under the form of sensible consolations. Of others, which do not have this repercussion, we may, nevertheless, be conscious, in the sense that God, especially by the gift of wisdom, makes Himself spiritually felt by us as the principle of the filial love for Him which He inspires in us. Cf. St. Thomas, *In Ep. ad Rom.*, 8: 16.

²³⁴ See Ia, q.105, a.4; Ia IIae, q.9, a.6; q.10, a.4; q.109, a.2,3,4,10.

²³⁵ See Ia IIae, q. III, a.2. Under cooperating grace, the will moves itself deliberately in virtue of an anterior act. It is thus that, already willing the end, it is led to the choice of means; whereas under operating grace it is moved not by virtue of an anterior act, but of a special inspiration.

²³⁶ Here there is certainly deliberation. It is not, however, by virtue of deliberation and of an anterior act that the sinner, at the moment of his conversion, is moved efficaciously to will the supernatural last end, for every anterior act is inferior to this efficacious will, and can only dispose to it. Consequently a special operating grace is necessary here. This grace is not required when, already efficaciously willing the end, we are led of ourselves to will the means. Then, only cooperating grace is required.

²³⁷ We treated this subject at greater length in *Christian Perfection and Contemplation*, pp. 285–310; “The special inspiration of the Holy Ghost and common actual grace.” According to a number of texts from St. Thomas, and following several great Thomists, in particular Father del Prado, we showed in that article that God moves the will, either before deliberation (when He leads it to will beatitude in general, or also the supernatural last end), or after deliberation, or with it (when He moves it to determine by discursive deliberation to will the means in view of the previously willed end), or above deliberation (by special inspiration, in particular by that to which the gifts of the Holy Ghost render us docile).

St. Thomas enumerates these three modes of motion in various passages: Ia IIae, q.9, a.6 ad 3 um; q.68, a.2 f.; q.109, a.1, 2, 6, 9; q.III, a.2; *De veritate*, q.24,a.15.

It suffices here to quote the classic text of Ia IIae, q. III, a. 2, on the distinction between operating and cooperating grace: “The operation of an effect is not attributed to the thing moved but to the mover. Hence in that effect in which our mind is moved and does not move, but in which God is the sole mover, the operation is attributed to God, and it is with reference to this that we speak of operating grace. But in that effect in which our mind both moves and is moved (virtute prioris actus), the operation is attributed not only to God, but also to the soul; and it is with reference ‘to this that we speak of cooperating grace.’” The operating grace may, however, present itself under several forms:⁽¹⁾ it may be only exciting, leading to a salutary good thought, which, as a matter of fact, remains sterile; ⁽²⁾ it may lead even to a salutary act of faith or hope, without there being the influence of the gifts of the Holy Ghost, as happens in the believer in the state of mortal sin; ⁽³⁾ it may lead even to a salutary and meritorious act of the gifts of the Holy Ghost. In this last case particularly, there is a special inspiration, not only before deliberation but above it. We can either be moved, or we can move ourselves to an act of faith (although it may be simple and not discursive), whereas we cannot of ourselves move ourselves to an act of the gifts.

²³⁸ Sermon 15, chap. I.

²³⁹ See II Cor. 6: I.

²⁴⁰ Herein lies the great mystery of grace; its two aspects, which are to be harmonized, may be expressed in the following manner: this mystery contains a striking light and shade: the light is expressed in two principles; the shade is their intimate harmonization. On the one hand, God never commands the impossible (that would be neither just nor merciful); but out of love, He makes the duties to be performed really possible for all. No adult is deprived of the grace necessary for salvation unless he refuses it by resisting the divine call, as did the bad thief dying beside the Savior. On the other hand, “since the love of God for us is the cause of all good, no one would be better than another if he were not more greatly loved by God,” as St. Thomas says (Ia, q.20, a.3). In this sense, Christ said: “Without Me you can do nothing” (John 15:5); and in speaking of the elect, He added: “No one can snatch them out of the hand of the Father” (John 10:29). St. Paul also asks: “For who distinguisheth thee? Or what hast thou that thou hast not received?” (I Cor. 4:7.) What more profound lesson in humility could be taught?

As a council of the Middle Ages states: “If some are saved, it is by the gift of the Savior; if others are lost, it is through their own fault.” (Denzinger, *Enchiridion*, no. 318.) Resistance to grace is an evil which can come only from us; non-resistance is a good which springs from the Source of all good. These formulas reconcile the two aspects of the mystery, and the principles that we have just recalled are incontestable. Each of these two principles taken separately is absolutely certain. That salvation is possible to all is a principle as certain as that “no one would be better than another if he were not more loved by God.” “What have we that we have not received?” But how can these two incontestable principles be intimately reconciled? No created intellect can see this harmony before receiving the beatific vision. In fact, were we to see it, we would see how infinite mercy, infinite justice, and sovereign liberty harmonize in the eminence of the Deity. We explained this problem in its relations to the spiritual life at greater length in *Christian Perfection and Contemplation*, pp. 80–113; Providence (English translation), pp. 334–40; *Predestination* (English translation), pp. 221 ff., 335 ff.

²⁴¹ John 10: 10.

²⁴² *Ibid.*, 7:38.

²⁴³ Some have thought that the special inspiration of the Holy Ghost diminishes the liberty of our act and that the act immediately caused by it, is not meritorious. This special inspiration no more diminishes our liberty than the absolute impeccability of Christ diminished His perfect liberty of obedience to the precepts of His Father. He could not disobey; He obeyed infallibly, but freely, the precept to die, for He preserved the indifference of judgment and of choice in the face of the painful death of the cross, which did not invincibly attract His will, as did the immediate vision of the divine goodness. We have explained this at length elsewhere (*Le Sauveur*, pp. 204–18).

²⁴⁴ This subject has been well treated by Father Froget, O.P., in *De l’habitation du Saint-Esprit dans les ames justes* (3rd ed. Paris: Lethielleux, 1900). More recently, the subject was treated by Father Gardeil, O.P., *La structure de l’ame et l’experience mystique* (Paris: Gabalda, 1927), II, 6–60. We have also dealt at length with this subject in *L’amour de Dieu et la croix de Jesus*, I, 163–206; II, 657–86.

²⁴⁵ Acts 17:24,27 f.

²⁴⁶ Wisd. 1:4.

²⁴⁷ John 14:13.

²⁴⁸ John 14: 16 f., 16.

²⁴⁹ See I John 4: 16.

²⁵⁰ Rom. 5:5.

²⁵¹ See I Cor. 3:16.

²⁵² *Ibid.*, 6: 19 f.

²⁵³ In the present case, we see clearly the importance of essentially divine tradition, which transmits to us through the legitimate shepherds of the Church, an orally revealed doctrine, whether it was later established in Scripture or not. All the organs of divine tradition may be invoked in the present case: the solemn teaching authority of the Church, and also its ordinary teaching authority expressed by the morally unanimous preaching of the bishops, by the consent of the fathers and of theologians, and by the Christian sense of the faithful.

²⁵⁴ *Ep.1 ad Serap.*, 31; PO, XXVI, 601.

²⁵⁵ *De Spiritu Sancto*, chap. 9, nos. 21 ff.; chap. 18, no. 47.

²⁵⁶ *Dialog.*, VII, PG, LXXV, 1085.

²⁵⁷ *De Spiritu Sancto*, I, chaps. 5–6.

²⁵⁸ *De fide et symbolo*, chap. 9, and *De Trinitate*, XV, chap. 27.

²⁵⁹ Denzinger, *Enchiridion*, no. 13.

²⁶⁰ Council of Trent, Sess. VI, chap. 7; Denzinger, no. 799.

²⁶¹ We set forth these explanations elsewhere (*L’amour de Dieu et la croix de Jesus*, I, 167–205), and we compared that of the Angelic Doctor, as understood by John of St. Thomas, and in more recent years by Father Gardeil, O.P., with those of Vasquez and Suarez. It will be sufficient here to review these opinions briefly.

Vasquez reduces every real presence of God in us to the general presence of immensity, according to which God is present in all things which He preserves in existence.

As an object known and loved, God is not really present in the just soul; He is, as it were, only represented there in the manner of an absent but very much loved person.

Suarez, on the contrary, maintains that, even if God were not already present in the just by the general presence of immensity, He would become really and substantially present in them by reason of the charity which unites them to Him. This opinion runs counter to the following strong objection: Although we love the humanity of the Savior and the Blessed Virgin by charity, it does not follow that they are really present in us, that they dwell in our souls. Of itself, charity constitutes an affective union and makes us desire real union; but how could it constitute this union?

John of St. Thomas (In Iam, q.43, a.3, disp. XVII, nos. 8–10) and Father Gardeil (op. cit., II, 7–60) have shown that the thought of St. Thomas towers above the mutually contradictory conceptions of Vasquez and of Suarez. According to the Angelic Doctor, contrary to what Suarez says, the special presence of the Blessed Trinity in the just man presupposes the general presence of immensity; but (and this is what Vasquez did not see) by sanctifying grace God is rendered really present in a new manner as an experimentally knowable object which the just soul can enjoy. He is not there only as a very much loved person who is absent, but He is really there, and at times He makes Himself felt by us. If, by an impossibility, God were not already in the just as the preserving cause of his natural being, He would, as a result, become specially present in him as the producing and preserving cause of grace and charity, and as a quasi-experimentally knowable object, and, from time to time, as an object known and loved.

²⁶² The systems, which do not attain to a superior synthesis, are generally true in what they affirm, and false in what they deny. What is true in each one of them is found again in the superior synthesis when the mind has discovered the eminent principle which permits the harmonization of the different aspects of the problem. In the present case, Vasquez seems to be wrong in denying that the special presence is that of an experimentally knowable object really present; and Suarez seems, indeed, to err in denying that this special presence presupposes the general presence of immensity by which God preserves all things in existence.

²⁶³ See Ia, q.43, a.3.

²⁶⁴ Ibid., a. I, c. and ad I um, 2 um.

²⁶⁵ St. Thomas had already stated this in his Commentary on the Sentences, I dist., 14, q.2, a.2 ad 3um. “Non qualiscumque cognitio sufficit ad rationem msslonis, sed solum illa quae accipitur ex aliquo dono appropriato personae, per quod efficitur in nobis conjunctio ad Deum, secundum modum proprium illius personae, scilicet per amorem, quando Spiritus Sanctus datur, unde cognitio ista est quasi-experimentalis” (ibid., ad 1um). This quasi-experimental knowledge of God, based on charity, which gives us a connaturality with divine things, proceeds especially from the gift of wisdom, as St. Thomas says (IIa IIae, q.45, a.2).

²⁶⁶ Thus our soul is always present to itself, as an experimentally knowable object, without always being actually known: for example, in deep sleep.

²⁶⁷ See Ia IIae, q. 112, a.5: “Whoever receives it (grace) knows, by experiencing a certain sweetness, which is not experienced by one who does not receive it.” It is a sign permitting us to conjecture and to have a moral certitude that we are in the state of grace.

²⁶⁸ Luke 24:32

²⁶⁹ John 14:23.

²⁷⁰ Ibid., 26.

²⁷¹ Father Gardeil, O.P., holds the same opinion as we do on this subject. He says.(op. cit., II,89): “In this fourth part, we will devote our best effort to showing that the mystical experience is the final flowering of the life of the Christian in the state of grace”; and (p. 368): “Mystical knowledge, supreme but normal flowering of the state of grace.”

²⁷² St. John of the Cross, *The Dark Night of the Soul*, Bk. I, chap. 14: “The way of... proficients, which is also called the illuminative way, or the way of infused contemplation, wherein God Himself teaches and refreshes the soul.”

²⁷³ See Ia, q.43, a.6 ad 2um.

²⁷⁴ *La croix de jesus*, original edition, p. 457; 3rd conference, chap. 4

²⁷⁵ Provo 23:16.

²⁷⁶ Apoc. 3:20.

²⁷⁷ Matt. 6:6.

²⁷⁸ Ibid., 5:48.

²⁷⁹ John 17:21.

²⁸⁰ C. Emile Mersch, S.J., *Le corps mystique du Christ*. Etude de theologie historique, 1936; *Morale et corps mystique*, 1937. Ernest Mura, *Le corps mystique du Christ*, sa nature et sa vie divine d’apres saint Paul et la theologie, 2nd ed., 1936.

²⁸¹ John 1:16. Cf. St. Thomas, IIIa, q.8: “Of the Grace of Christ, as He Is the Head of the Church” (in eight articles). *Commentum in Joannem*, 15: 1–7: “I am the vine; you the branches.”

²⁸² John 15: 1–7.

- [283](#) Matt. 6:33.
- [284](#) Rom. 11:17.
- [285](#) See I Cor. 12:27.
- [286](#) Eph. 4: 15 f.
- [287](#) Col. 3:15.
- [288](#) See Ia Hae, q.III, a.2.
- [289](#) See IIIa, q.43, a. 2; q.48, a.6.
- [290](#) The act of charity ever living in the heart of Christ can always be the physical, instrumental cause of the graces that we receive. It suffices, moreover, that the instrument convey the influx of the principal cause, as the transmitter passes on the human word.
- [291](#) John 6: 27, 32 f.
- [292](#) Ibid., 34–36.
- [293](#) Ibid., 41.
- [294](#) Ibid., 43, 47–52, 55 f., 64.
- [295](#) Ibid., 68 f.
- [296](#) Matt. 26:26–28; Mark 14:25; Luke :15–20; I Cor. 11:23–25.
- [297](#) Luke 22: 19.
- [298](#) See I Cor. 11: 24 f.
- [299](#) Heb. 7:25.
- [300](#) See I Cor. 10: 16.
- [301](#) An excellent Communion may be made in great sensible aridity, just as the prayer of Christ in Gethsemane was excellent.
- [302](#) Confessions, Bk. VII, chap. 10.
- [303](#) On this point consult the works of Dom Marmion: Christ, the Life of the Soul; Christ in His Mysteries; Christ, the Ideal of the Monk.
- [304](#) Rom. 6:4, 6.
- [305](#) Gal. 5: 24.
- [306](#) Col. 3:10,12,14.
- [307](#) Rom. 8:7.
- [308](#) Ibid., 6:5.
- [309](#) Col. 3:1.
- [310](#) Phil. 3:8.
- [311](#) Denzinger, Enchiridion, 1255.
- [312](#) St. Teresa, The Interior Castle, second mansion, chap. I; sixth mansion, chap. 7; Life, chap. 22.
- [313](#) Blessed Grignon de Montfort, *Treatise on the True Devotion to the Blessed Virgin*, chap. 2, a. I, § I. See also *The Secret of Mary*, by the same author. It is a summary of the preceding treatise.
- [314](#) Cf. St. Bernard, *Serm. in Dominic. infra. Oct. Assumpt.*, no. 1 (PL, CLXXXIII, 429). *Serm. in Nativ. B. V. Mariae De aquaeductu*, nos. 6–7 (PL, CLXXXIII, 440). *Epist. ad Canonicos Lugdunenses de Conceptione S. Mariae*, no. 2 (PL, CLXXXII, 333). St. Albert the Great, *Mariale sive Quaestiones super Evangelium: Missus est* (ed. A. Borgnetj Paris, 1890–99, XXXVII, q. 29)’ St. Bonaventure, *Sermones de B. V. Maria, De Annuntiatione*, serm. V (Quarrachi, 1901, IX, 679). St.

Thomas, *In Salute. angel. expositio*. Bossuet, *Sermon sur la Sainte Vierge*. Terrien, S.T., *La Mere de Dieu et la Mere des hommes*, III. Hugon, O.P., *Marie pleine de grace*. J. Bittremieux, *De mediatione universalis B. Mariae V. quoad gratias*, 1926, Beyaert, Bruges. Leon Leloir, *La mediation mariale dans la theologie contemporaine*, 1933, ibid. P. R. Bernard, O.P., *Le mystere de Marie*, Desclee de Brouwer, Paris, 1933, This excellent book ought to be meditated upon. See also P. G. Friethoff, O.P., *De alma Socia Christi mediatoris*, Rome, 1936. J. V. Bainvel, S.J., *Le saint coeur de Marie*, 1919. P. Joret, O.P., *Le Rosaire de Marie*, an annotated translation of the Encyclicals of Leo XIII on the Rosary, 1933.

³¹⁵ See IIIa, q.26, a.1.

³¹⁶ Ibid., ad 1um.

³¹⁷ Ibid., a.2.

³¹⁸ *Mariale*, 42.

³¹⁹ Cajetan.

³²⁰ Ct. J Bittremieux, op. cit.

³²¹ Ct. G. Friethoff, O.P., *Angelicum* (October, 1933), pp 469–77

³²² See IIIa, q. 30, a. 1.

³²³ Luke 2:30–31.

³²⁴ John 10: 18.

³²⁵ Ibid., 19:25.

³²⁶ Litt. Apost., Inter sodalicia, March 22, 1918. (Act. Ap. Sed., 1918, p. 182; quoted in Denzinger, 16th ed., no. 3034, n.4.)

³²⁷ See IIIa, q.48, a.2: “He properly atones for an offense who offers something which the offended one loves not less, or even more, than he detested the offense. But by suffering out of love and obedience, Christ gave more to God than was required to compensate for the offense of the whole human race.... First of all, because of the exceeding charity from which He suffered; secondly, on account of the dignity of His life which He laid down in atonement, for it was the life of one who was God and man; thirdly, on account of the extent of the Passion, and the greatness of the grief endured.”

³²⁸ “Satisfactio B. M. Virginis fundatur, non in stricta iustitia, sed in iure amabili.” This is the common teaching of the theologians.

³²⁹ Benedict XV, Litt. Apost., citat.: “Ita cum Filio patiente et moriente passa est et paene commortua, sic materna in Filium jura pro hominum salute abdicavit placandaeque Dei iustitiae, quantum ad se pertinebat, Filium immolavit, ut dici merito queat, *ipsam cum Christo humanum genus redemisse*.” Denzinger, *Enchiridion*, no. 3034, n4.

³³⁰ Cf. Piu X, Encyclical, *Ad diem illum*, Feb. 2, 1904 (Denzinger, *Enchiridion*, 3034): “Quoniam universis sanctitate praestat conjunctioneque cum Christo atque a Christo ascita in humanae salutis opus, de congruo, ut aiunt, promeruit nobis, quae Christus de condigno promeruit, estque princeps largiendarum gratiarum ministra.” It should be remarked that merit *de congruo*, which is based *in jure amabili seu in caritate* is a merit properly so called, although inferior to merit *de condigno*. The word “merit” is used for both according to an analogy of proper and not only metaphorical proportionality.

³³¹ St. Irenaeus, who represents the Churches of Asia where he was trained, the Church of Rome where he lived, and the Churches of Gaul where he taught, wrote (*Adv. haeres.*, V, 19, I): “As Eve, seduced by the discourse of the (rebellious) angel, turned away from God and betrayed His word, so Mary heard from the angel the good tidings of the truth. She bore God in her bosom because she obeyed His word.... The human race, enchained by a virgin, was delivered by a virgin...; the prudence of the serpent yielded to the simplicity of the dove; the bonds which chained us in death were broken.”

In a prayer used in the second nocturn of the Office of Mary Mediatrix, St. Ephrem concludes from this parallel between Eve and the Mother of God, that “Mary is, after Jesus, the mediator par excellence, the mediatrix of the entire world, and that it is through her that we obtain all spiritual goods (tu creaturam replesti omni genere beneficiorum caelestibus laetitiam attulisti, terrestria salvasti).

St. Germanus of Constantinople (Oratio 9, pa, XCVIII, 377 ff., quoted in the same nocturn of the Office) even says: “No one is saved except by thee, O most holy; no one is delivered except through thee, O most immaculate; no one receives the gifts of God except through thee, O purest.”

St. Bernard says: “O our mediatrix, O our advocate, reconcile us with thy Son; recommend us to thy Son; present us to thy Son” (Second sermon adventu, 5). “It is the will of God that we should have everything through Mary” (On the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary, no. 7). “She is full of grace; the overflow is poured out on us” (Sermon II on the Assumption, no. 1).

³³² John 19:16f.

³³³ See Ia q. I, a.10: “The author of Holy Scripture is God, in whose power it is to signify His meaning, not by words only (as men also can do), but also by things themselves.”

³³⁴ See Ia IIae, q.114, a.6: “It is clear that no one can merit condignly for another his first grace, save Christ alone... inasmuch as He is the head of the Church and the author of human salvation.... But one may merit the first grace for another congruously; because a man in grace fulfills God’s will, and it is congruous and in harmony with

friendship that God should fulfill man's desire for the salvation of another, although sometimes there may be an impediment on the part of him whose salvation the just man desires."

³³⁵ The Jansenists altered this verse in order not to affirm this universal mediation of Mary.

³³⁶ Encyclical on the Rosary, *Octobri mense*, September 11, 1891 (Denzinger, no. 3033).

³³⁷ See IIa IIae, q.24, a.4–10

³³⁸ Ibid., a.4.

³³⁹ John 7:37 f.

³⁴⁰ See St. Thomas, *In Ep. ad Hebr.*, 10:25. See also St. Thomas, I, *De coelo*, chap. 8, lect. 17: "Terra (vel corpus grave) velocius movetur quanta magis descendit." Cf. Ia IIae, q.35, a.6: "Every natural movement is more intense in the end, when a thing approaches the term that is suitable to its nature, than at the beginning... as though nature were more eager in tending to what is suitable to it than in shunning what is unsuitable." This growing rapidity of the natural movement of bodies has been measured by modern physics and is explained in the law of acceleration of falling bodies, a particular case of the universal gravitation of bodies, symbol of what the gravitation of souls toward God should be. We studied this analogy at considerable length in *L' amour de Dieu et la croix de Jesus* (I, 150–62).

³⁴¹ John 12:32.

³⁴² Ibid., 6:44.

³⁴³ Ps. 102:5.

³⁴⁴ See IIa IIae, q.24, a.5.

³⁴⁵ If, in fact, the second degree of charity were thus added to the first, it would be its equal or superior. If it were equal, charity would only be multiplied like the grains of wheat in a pile; it would not be rendered more intense. If, on the contrary, the second degree of charity were superior to the first, the latter would become useless.

³⁴⁶ See I Cor. 3:6–9.

³⁴⁷ See II Cor. 9:10.

³⁴⁸ *Summa*, Ia IIae, q.114, a.8.

³⁴⁹ Sess. VI, can. 24, 32.

³⁵⁰ See IIa IIae, q.24, a.7, corp. and ad 2um.

³⁵¹ See Ia, q.43, a.6 ad 2um.

³⁵² Suarez, *De gratia*, VIII, chap. 1.

³⁵³ See IIa IIae, q.14, a.6 ad 1um; Ia IIae, q. 114, a.8 ad 3um.

³⁵⁴ See Ia IIae, q. 112, a.2; IIa IIae, q.24, a.3.

³⁵⁵ When do they obtain this increase of grace? It is very difficult to answer this question on which Thomists themselves are divided.

Some Thomists, Banez, Contenson, and others, thought that imperfect meritorious acts obtain the increase of charity as soon as the just man makes a fervent act which disposes to this increase; but they add that this increase, which corresponds to this last disposition, would be as great if the imperfect meritorious acts had not preceded the fervent act. Other Thomists (John of St. Thomas, the Carmelites of Salamanca, Gonet, Billuart, and others) quite commonly answer this opinion by stating that then the imperfect meritorious acts already accomplished would be defrauded of the increase which they merited. Therefore the merit of these acts would no longer be true, condign merit in justice. By these imperfect good acts, the just soul would not grow in charity, an idea contrary to the declaration of the Council of Trent (Sess. VI, chap. 10), that a just man by his good works grows in grace and charity. If anyone who has ten talents acts for many years as if he had only eight, and when dying makes an act of charity employing his ten talents, he ought to have, it seems, a greater essential reward (*praemium essentiale*) than he who when dying makes an identical act after having spent his whole life in mortal sin. Imperfect good acts seem, therefore, truly to merit a special increase of grace distinct from that due to the fervent act which follows them. But when does the just man receive this special increase of charity that is due to his imperfect meritorious acts (which are very frequent in our lives)? We can hardly admit that it may be here below when one performs a more fervent act, for then the increase received seems to correspond only to the disposition realized by this last act (d. Salmanticenses, *De caritate*, disp. V, dub. 3, § 2).

Cajetan is sometimes credited with this opinion, that the increase due to weak acts of charity may be granted at the moment of a fervent Communion, for grace is granted then according to the dispositions of the subject, dispositions in which the merits of remissive acts enter. This opinion may be held.

Good Thomists, like John of St. Thomas, the Carmelites of Salamanca, Gonet, and Billuart, hold that if the just man goes to purgatory, he receives there this increase of grace when he makes intense acts of charity, which are no longer meritorious, since the hour of meriting is passed, but which prepare the soul to receive the increase already merited and not yet obtained for lack of sufficient dispositions. This opinion is seriously probable.

According to these same theologians, if the just man in question does not have to go to purgatory, the increase of charity due to his imperfect meritorious acts is granted to him at the instant of his entrance into glory, for in that instant the separated soul, which can no longer merit, makes as intense an act of love of God as possible. This act corresponds to all the merits of his past life. This opinion conforms to the general principle that the ultimate disposition to a form or perfection is realized at the same indivisible instant as this very perfection itself, as happens in the justification of an adult.

The theology of these very elevated and mysterious matters can scarcely go beyond these solutions, which are seriously probable.

³⁵⁶ Cf. Salmanticenses, *De caritate*, disp. V, dub. 3, § 7, nos. 76, 80, 85, 93, 117.

³⁵⁷ See IIa IIae, q.24, a.7: “Whenever charity increases, there is a corresponding increased ability to receive a further increase.”

Ibid., ad 2um: “The capacity of the rational creature is increased by charity, because the heart is enlarged thereby, according to II Cor. 6: 11: ‘Our heart is enlarged’; so that it still remains capable of receiving a further increase.”

³⁵⁸ Ps. 118:32.

³⁵⁹ See II Cor. 6: 11, 13.

³⁶⁰ Sess. VI, chap. 10.

³⁶¹ Cf. IIa IIae, q.83, a. 16, c. and ad 2um.

³⁶² Ibid., a.2, 9, 15.

³⁶³ Ibid., a.16.

³⁶⁴ Ibid., q.24, a.3 ad 2um; Ia IIae, q.69, a.2; *De veritate*, q.14, a.2.

³⁶⁵ See Ia IIae, q. 14, a.9

³⁶⁶ Sess. VI, chap. 7.

³⁶⁷ See IIIa, q.89, a. 2.

³⁶⁸ The merits deprived of life by mortal sin thus revive according to the measure of the penitent’s fervor. They revive truly with their right to a special essential reward. For example, if a Christian, who has served the Lord generously for seventy years, should sin mortally and then before death be converted with a contrition equal to five talents, he will have in heaven a higher degree of glory than one who had lived badly all his life and who before death also had a contrition equal to five talents. The long merits of the first man’s life revive, and, as they are chiefly a right to eternal life, to essential beatitude, this right revives with them. We see also in this case the intervention of infinite mercy. Cf. Billuart, *Cursus theol. de poenitentia*, dis. 3, chap. 5, “De reviviscentia meritorum per poenitentiam.”

³⁶⁹ True, we must take into account the fact that the soul which advances knows its own wretchedness so much the more as it more clearly sees the grandeur of God.

³⁷⁰ John 7:37 f.

³⁷¹ Cf. supra, chap. I.

³⁷² See IIa Iae, q. 123, 6: “The principal act of fortitude is endurance, that is, to stand immovable in the midst of dangers rather than to attack them.”

³⁷³ Eph. 6.13–16.

³⁷⁴ See IIa IIae, q. 124, a. 1–3.

³⁷⁵ Ibid., q.188, a.7 ad 1um; a.8.

³⁷⁶ Consult *Nicomachean Ethics*, Bk. III, chap. 7; Bk. VII, chap. 11, and the commentary of St. Thomas. See also Ia IIae, Q.58, a.2.

³⁷⁷ See Ia IIae, q.57, a. 1: “Whether the habits of the speculative intellect are virtues?”

³⁷⁸ Ibid., a.4, where St. Thomas shows that prudence, which is a true virtue, presupposes the rightness of the will with regard to the good of the whole man, whereas art and the sciences do not presuppose it. The prudent man is a good man, of whom people simply say that he is good, and not only a good painter, a good architect, a good physician, a good mathematician.

³⁷⁹ *Ethics*, Bk. VI, chap. 5: How prudence, which is truly a virtue, is distinct from art.

³⁸⁰ See Ia, q. 82, a. 3: “The love of God is better than the knowledge of God.”

³⁸¹ Cf. P. Mainage, O.P., *Les principes de la theosophie*, 1922 (ed. *Revue des jeunes*).

³⁸² Wisd. 4: 12.

³⁸³ Luke 10:27; Deut. 6:5.

³⁸⁴ See I Cor. 13: 1–3.

³⁸⁵ There exists, in fact, a false charity, made up of culpable indulgence, of weakness, such as the meekness of those who never clash with anybody because they are afraid of everyone. There is also a false charity, made up of humanitarian sentimentalism, which seeks to have itself approved by true charity and which, by its contact, often taints the true.

One of the chief conflicts of the present day is that which arises between true and false charity. The latter reminds us of the false Christs spoken of in the Gospel; they are more dangerous before they are unmasked than when they make themselves known as the true enemies of the Church. *Optimi corruptio pessima*, the worst of corruptions is that which attacks what is best in us, the highest of the theological virtues. The apparent good which attracts the sinner is, in fact, so much the more dangerous as it is the counterfeit of a higher good. Such, for example, is the ideal of the pan-Christians, who seek the union of the Churches to the detriment of the faith, which this union presupposes. If, therefore, through stupidity or more or less conscious cowardice, those who should represent true charity approve here and there the dicta of the false, an incalculable evil may result. This evil is at times greater than that done by open persecutors, with whom evidently one can no longer have anything in common.

³⁸⁶ See I Cor. 13:4–7.

³⁸⁷ Ibid., 8, 12 f.

³⁸⁸ Rom. 5:5.

³⁸⁹ Shakespeare, Hamlet, Act I, scene 5.

³⁹⁰ Cf. The Commentary of St. Thomas, In Epist. ad Ephes., 3: 17.

³⁹¹ Luke 7:47.

³⁹² See IIa IIae, q. 188, a.7 ad 1um.

³⁹³ Ibid., q. 161, a.5 ad 1um: “Humility holds the first place, inasmuch as it expels pride (the source of all sin), which God resisteth, and makes man open to receive the influx of divine grace.... In this sense, humility is said to be the foundation of the spiritual edifice.” (It is inferior to the theological virtues which unite us to God.)

³⁹⁴ The virtue of religion has for its immediate object, not God Himself but the worship which is due to God. This is why it is not a theological virtue, but is inferior to the theological virtues. Cf. *Summa*, IIa IIae, q.81, a.5.

³⁹⁵ See IIa IIae, q. 184, a. 1.

³⁹⁶ Ibid., a.1.

³⁹⁷ John 13:34f.

³⁹⁸ See I John 1:9.

³⁹⁹ Ibid., 3: 14 f.

⁴⁰⁰ See Ia, q.8; a. 3. “Wherefore the love of God is better than the knowledge of God; but, on the contrary, the knowledge of corporeal things is better than the love thereof. Absolutely, however, the intellect is nobler than the will.”

⁴⁰¹ See Ia IIae. q. 3. a.4; q.5, a.4.

⁴⁰² See Ia, q.82, a.3. On the contrary, it is better to know inferior things than to love them.

⁴⁰³ Ibid.

⁴⁰⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁰⁵ See IIa IIae, q.27, a.4.

⁴⁰⁶ Ibid., ad 2um.

⁴⁰⁷ Ibid., q.45, a.2, 4.

⁴⁰⁸ See Col. 1: 9. Thomists generally hold (cf. Passerini, *De statibus hominum*, in IIa IIae, q. 184, a. 1) that perfection consists formally not in the habitus or virtue of charity, but in the activity of this virtue, which is morally continuous in the perfect. It is clear, in fact, that the virtue is ordained to its operation and that perfection is in actual union with God; “It is good for me to adhere to my God” (Ps. 72:28). St. Thomas says: “Man’s third pursuit is to aim chiefly at union with and enjoyment of God”

(IIa IIae, q.24, a.9).

On the contrary, the quietists, inclined to inaction, were disposed to say that perfection is not in the acts of charity, but in the habitus of charity, for, in their opinion, “velle operari active est Deum offendere, qui vult esse ipse solus agens” (d. Denzinger, no. 1222). They thus reached a pseudo-passive state, not infused but acquired and, what is more, acquired, not by acts but by the cessation of every act, by a sort of pious somnolence. Therein were two grave errors, which with one stroke of the pen suppressed asceticism and distorted mysticism.

An opposite excess to quietism would make perfection consist chiefly in the exterior activity of charity on behalf of one’s neighbor. From this point of view, one might end by forgetting practically that the love of God is superior to that of one’s neighbor, and that this second love is only the effect and sign of the first. One would thus unconsciously invert the order of charity.

Others, more attentive to the interior life than to its activity, aim too greatly at multiplying its acts, instead of tending to simplified affective prayer, which is, so to speak, the continuation of one and the same act, like a prolonged spiritual communion.

⁴⁰⁹ See IIa IIae, q. 184, a. 2.

⁴¹⁰ We treated this question in greater detail in *Christian Perfection and Contemplation*, pp. 167–75.

⁴¹¹ See IIa IIae, q.24, a.6.

⁴¹² St. Thomas, I n *Ep. ad Hebr.*, 10:25.

⁴¹³ See IIa IIae, q. 184, a.2 ad 3um.

⁴¹⁴ John 15:12.

⁴¹⁵ Acts 5:41.

⁴¹⁶ See II Cor. 12: 15. Cf. also St. Catherine of Siena, Dialogue, chaps. 74, 78, 79, passim; Perfect love and its signs.

⁴¹⁷ The Imitation of Christ, Bk. III, chap. 5. St. Thomas teaches that we cannot love God as much as He ought to be loved, or believe in Him or hope in Him as much as He deserves. Cf. Ia IIae, q.64, a.4: “The measure and rule of theological virtue is God Himself.... So that never can we love God as much as He ought to be loved.” Cf. IIa IIae, q.27, a.5.

See also Tauler, *Sermons*, for the distinction between the upright man and the interior or spiritual man, and the description of the state of the perfect. Cf. *Sermons de Tauler* (trans. Hugueny. Thery, 1927). I, 200–4. 218–24, 265–69. 284, 296 ff., 357.

⁴¹⁸ St. Thomas, IIa, IIae, q. 184, a. I.

⁴¹⁹ See I John 4: 16.

⁴²⁰ Col. 3: 14.

⁴²¹ Among them must be mentioned Suarez, *De statu perfectionis*, Bk. I, chap. 4, nos. 11, 12, 20. One can see why several of those who do not wish to admit that Christian perfection requires a great charity and the gifts of the Holy Ghost in a proportionate degree, refuse also to concede that infused contemplation, which proceeds from living faith enlightened by the gifts, is in the normal way of sanctity and, as it were, the normal prelude of the beatific vision.

⁴²² See III Sent., d.31, q.1, a.3, and also IIIa, q.62, a.6 ad 3um.

⁴²³ See IIa IIae, q.24, a.9.

⁴²⁴ Ibid., q. 184, a.2.

⁴²⁵ In Luke 6: 20–22, only four beatitudes are mentioned; but among them is found the highest, that of those who suffer persecution for justice’ sake. It follows that of the poor, that of those who hunger after justice, and that of those who weep.

⁴²⁶ See Ia IIae, q.69, a. I. Cf. *Commentarium in Mattheum*, 5:3: “These merits (of the beatitudes) are either acts of the gifts, or acts of the virtues according as they are perfected by the gifts.” Following St. Augustine, St. Thomas indicates in this commentary on St. Matthew (chap. 5) the gift that corresponds to each beatitude. He does this also in the *Summa*, where he speaks of the seven gifts in particular. We shall summarize this teaching here.

⁴²⁷ Luke 6:25.

⁴²⁸ Matt. 5:39.

⁴²⁹ Ibid., 5: 34.

⁴³⁰ Luke 16: 25.

⁴³¹ Dialogue, chap. 89.

- ⁴³² John 7:37f.
- ⁴³³ St. Thomas, In Matth. 5: 6.
- ⁴³⁴ Matt. 5:29f.
- ⁴³⁵ Ibid, 6: 22.
- ⁴³⁶ See Ia IIae, q.69,a.2.
- ⁴³⁷ Ibid. and *In Matth.*, 5: 1 ff.
- ⁴³⁸ *Life*, chap. 31, § 21.
- ⁴³⁹ *The Way of Perfection*, chap. 12.
- ⁴⁴⁰ *The Imitation of Christ*, Bk. III, chap. 25.
- ⁴⁴¹ Ibid., chap. 31.
- ⁴⁴² *The Dialogue*, chaps. 44–49.
- ⁴⁴³ St. Augustine, *In sermonem Domini in monte* (Matt. 5). *De quantitate animae*, I, chap. 33; *The Confessions*, Bk. IX, chap. 10; *Soliloquia*, I, chaps. 1, 12 f.
- ⁴⁴⁴ *De statu perfectionis*, Bk. I, chap. 4, nos. 11 f.
- ⁴⁴⁵ Suarez (loc. cit.) says: “Perfection is posited in any suitable disposition or facility for acting perfectly according to the precepts and counsels of Christ; this good disposition can be obtained and subsist with greater and lesser intensity of charity, because it does not spring from intensity only, and although the intensity of charity helps much, what is lacking from that part can be easily supplied from another source.” These last words, which would astonish us greatly if we were to find them in an article written by St. Thomas, mean, it seems, that the acquired virtues can easily supply for the lack of intensity of charity. Does this not notably diminish the supernatural character of Christian perfection?
- Suarez adds (ibid., no. 11): “A man can be holier in the sight of God and yet rather imperfect.... Nor is this unfitting, because true sanctity in the sight of God and the right to eternal beatitude depend on the degree of charity and grace. Moreover, perfection of this life depends on the disposition and inclination of a man to act in this life with promptness, ease, and purity of action.”
- A Thomist will say that, with an equal degree of habitual charity, one person is actually more generous than another who is content with imperfect (remissi) acts, or who having five talents lives as though he had only three. Further, with an equal degree of habitual charity and of actual generosity, one person will have fewer interior and exterior difficulties than another who easily avoids every misstep because he follows an easier road. But these are accidental things relative to a given individual, whereas we are treating here of perfection in itself and in general, and we are considering whether it essentially demands a great charity, notably superior to that of beginners and to that of proficients.
- ⁴⁴⁶ St. Thomas, IIIa, q.62, a.6 ad 3um.
- ⁴⁴⁷ See Ia IIae, q.24, a.4 ad 1um, 2um; a.5 ad 2um.
- ⁴⁴⁸ Ecclus. 27:6.
- ⁴⁴⁹ Matt. 7:24f.
- ⁴⁵⁰ Bk. II, chap. 7, passim.
- ⁴⁵¹ *The Dark Night of the Soul*, Bk. II, chap. 18.
- ⁴⁵² See IIa IIae, q. 161, a.6.
- ⁴⁵³ Ibid., q.24, a.9.
- ⁴⁵⁴ See III Sent., d.29, a.8, q. I.
- ⁴⁵⁵ See IIa IIae, q.24, a.6 ad 1um; Ia IIae, q. 114, a.8 ad 3um.
- ⁴⁵⁶ See IIIa, q.79, a.8.
- ⁴⁵⁷ Ibid., q.89, a.2.
- ⁴⁵⁸ See IIa IIae, q.124, a.1 ad 3 um; q. 152, a.3 ad 2um.

⁴⁵⁹ Luke 16:10.

⁴⁶⁰ Matt. 10:28.

⁴⁶¹ Luke 12: 11 f.

⁴⁶² See II Tim. 3: 12.

⁴⁶³ See Ia IIae, q.68, a.2

⁴⁶⁴ De servorum Dei beatificatione, Bk. III, chap. 21.

⁴⁶⁵ *The Dark Night of the Soul*, Bk. I, chaps. 2–10; Bk. II, chaps. 1–5. St. John of the Cross here describes this purification as it occurs in contemplatives called to the highest perfection by the most direct route. There is, however, something similar in others, in whom these interior purifications are accompanied by the sufferings and difficulties of the apostolate.

⁴⁶⁶ See Ia IIae, q.61, a.5; IIIa, q.7, a.2 ad 2um.

⁴⁶⁷ St. Thomas (ibid.) thus describes the perfecting virtues: “Thus prudence, by contemplating the things of God, counts as nothing all things of the world and directs all the thoughts of the soul to God alone; temperance, so far as nature allows, neglects the needs of the body; fortitude prevents the soul from being afraid of neglecting the body and rising to heavenly things; and justice consists in the soul’s giving a wholehearted consent to follow the way thus proposed.”

The perfect virtues (ibid.) are even loftier and are the distinctive character of some very perfect servants of God (“some who are at the summit of perfection in this life”). St. Catherine of Siena expresses the same idea in her Dialogue (chap. 74), when she enumerates the signs of the charity of the perfect.

⁴⁶⁸ *The Dark Night of the Soul*, Bk. II, chaps. 19 f.

⁴⁶⁹ St. Thomas answers a similar objection in regard to the number of the elect (Ia, q.13, a.7 ad 3um): “The good that is proportionate to the common state of nature is to be found in the majority and is wanting in the minority. The good that exceeds the common state of nature is to be found in the minority and is wanting in the majority. Thus it is clear that the majority of men have a sufficient knowledge for guidance of life;... but they who at attain to a profound knowledge of things intelligible are a very small minority in respect to the rest.” The human intellect is not incapable of knowing those things, but as a matter of fact few men reach this knowledge.

⁴⁷⁰ False martyrs, on the contrary, do not pray for their executioners. We do not see in these martyrs the connection between the most varied virtues; rather because of pride, their wills resist suffering, instead of abandoning themselves to God while seeking to save souls.

⁴⁷¹ In this question, as in the preceding one, there are two deviations. The quietists seriously diminished the importance of the virtues which are distinct from charity. Quietism, properly so called, suppressed mortification (which is the exercise of the virtues of penance, temperance, and patience) and the exercise of the virtues relating to our neighbor. It fell into a false mysticism, declaring that a person must remain in obscure faith and pure love, without giving thanks to God, without addressing prayers of petition to Him, without gaining indulgences, without positively resisting temptations. Cf. Denzinger, nos. 1232–38, 1241, 1255–75, 1327.

On the other hand, some authors have insisted on the exercise of the virtue of penance, on the interior and exterior acts of worship and those of fraternal charity, to the point of not recognizing in a sufficiently practical way the superiority of the love of God. This misplaced emphasis would lead either to an almost antimystical asceticism or to an excessively exterior apostolic life. It should not be forgotten that the interior life is the soul of the apostolate.

⁴⁷² Cf. Passerini, O.P., De statibus hominum, in Ia IIae, q. 184, a. I, no. 8: “Actual perfection consists essentially, not alone in the act of charity, but also in the acts of the other virtues governed by charity, in so far as they are of precept.”

Ibid., no. 10: “Actual perfection consists especially and principally in charity alone, in so far as charity perfects simply, the other virtues secundum quid.... Therefore actual perfection is formally in charity alone, which is the bond of perfection.... Nevertheless the other virtues pertain to the essence of perfection, as matter to the essence of a composite nature.” Ibid., p. 23, nos. 20 ff.: “The acts of the other virtues, as they are of counsel, are accidents of perfection.”

By this distinction between what is of precept and what is of counsel in the virtues inferior to charity, Passerini brings to bear a precision which Cajetan had forgotten (in Ia IIae, q. 184, a. 1), and clearly states the thought of St. Thomas. Cajetan was accustomed to say: “Corrigendi videntur codices.”

⁴⁷³ See Ia IIae, q. 184, a. 3: “Primarily and essentially the perfection of the Christian life consists in charity.... Secondly and instrumentally, however, perfection consists in the observance of the counsels.”

⁴⁷⁴ See I Cor. 7: 31. Cf. St. Thomas’ Commentary on this Epistle.

⁴⁷⁵ St. Thomas, Ia IIae, q. 184, a.3: “The counsels are directed to the removal of things that hinder the act of charity and yet are not contrary to charity, such as marriage, the occupation of worldly business, and so forth.”

⁴⁷⁶ St. Thomas, Ia IIae, q.68, a.5.

⁴⁷⁷ Therefore we are surprised that Suarez (*De statu perfectionis*, Bk. I, chapter 4, nos. 11, 12, 20) should have maintained that a high degree of charity is accidentally proper to the perfect; and that it may happen that a man who is holier than another, by reason of the intensity of his charity, may be less perfect than another. Normally this is not the case, but he who is holier may accidentally have temperamental or exterior difficulties which the other has not. Moreover, here it is a question of perfection according to the judgment of God, not according to the judgment of men, who sometimes characterize as humble one who is pusillanimous, and as proud one who is magnanimous, or inversely.

⁴⁷⁸ Phil. 3:8–20; 4:1.

⁴⁷⁹ The world contains many lost or sterile crosses, such as that of the bad thief. These crosses could have been fruitful had they been borne with patience and love in union with our Lord, according to the words of St. Paul which we have just quoted: “In the fellowship of His sufferings.”

⁴⁸⁰ John 15: 1 f.

⁴⁸¹ See St. Thomas, *In Joannem*, 15: 1: “‘And everyone that beareth fruit, He will purge it, that it may bring forth more fruit.’ In the life of nature it happens that a palm tree having many sprouts bears less fruit because of the diffusion of the sap to all the branches. Thus, in order that it may bear more fruit, cultivators trim away its superfluous shoots. So it is in man. Now, if in a man who is well disposed and united to God, his affection inclines to diverse things, his virtue decreases and he becomes more ineffective in doing good. And so it is that God, that the man may bring forth fruit, frequently cuts away impediments of this type and purges him, sending tribulations and temptations by which he may be made stronger for action. Therefore He says: ‘He will purge him,’ even if he is pure, because nobody is so pure in this life that he cannot be more and more purified.”

⁴⁸² Gal. 5: 16 f.

⁴⁸³ Rom. 8:4.

⁴⁸⁴ Cf. Luke 10:27. Christ even tells us: “This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you” (John 15: 12). When a person truly loves, if the occasion should arise of taking vengeance on an enemy, and he should ask himself: “Is asceticism or mysticism involved here?” the question would seem ridiculous and marked by an unbearable pedantry desirous, at any price, of classifying in one category or another what constitutes the very impulse of life toward God.

⁴⁸⁵ See II Tim. 3: 12.

⁴⁸⁶ The Dark Night of the Soul, Bk I, chap. 3.

⁴⁸⁷ Ibid., chap. I.

⁴⁸⁸ Ibid., chap. 14: “Via iluminativa o de contemplacion infusa.”

⁴⁸⁹ Ibid., Bk. II, chaps. I and 2: In chapter 1, speaking of the imperfections of the advanced, St. John says they are “much more incurable than the others, because they consider them as more spiritual.... If that (divine union) is to be attained, the soul must enter the second night of the spirit.... There it will travel on the road of faith, dark and pure, the proper and adequate means of union.” Ibid., Bk. II, chap. 18: On the ascending and descending fluctuations before the soul reaches the state of definitive peace, “the state of perfection, which consists in the perfect love of God, and contempt of self.”

⁴⁹⁰ Cf. *ibid.*, chap. 10. St. John speaks here of souls which “because of their perfect purification by God will not have to pass through purgatory.”

According to St. John of the Cross, the full perfection attainable here below, is found only in the transforming union. Cf. *The Spiritual Canticle*, Stanza 22: “For in this state, the soul is no longer molested, either by the devil, or the flesh, or the world, or the desires, seeing that here is fulfilled what is written in the Canticle (2:11 f.): ‘Winter is now past, the rain is over and gone. The flowers have appeared in our land.’ “The soul then, finds a holy joy in suffering in union with our Lord (*ibid.*, stanza 24), all the virtues have reached their perfect development (*ibid.*) and also the gifts of the Holy Ghost (cf. *ibid.*, stanza 16. and *The Ascent of Mount Carmel*, Bk. III, chap. I).

⁴⁹¹ At the beginning of the third and fourth parts of this work.

⁴⁹² The passive character of these purifications, as we shall see more clearly in what follows, belongs to an order superior to simple asceticism or the exercise of the virtues according to our own activity. We have treated this question at greater length elsewhere. Cf. *Christian Perfection and Contemplation*, pp. 146–78, and *L'amour de Dieu et la croix de Jesus*, II, 458–657.

⁴⁹³ *The Dark Night of the Soul*, Bk. I, chap. 9: The three signs of the passive purification of the senses.

⁴⁹⁴ We have treated this point at greater length in *Christian Perfection and Contemplation*, pp. 409 ff.

⁴⁹⁵ Wisd. 7:7.

⁴⁹⁶ Hardly any Thomists would wish to deny this proposition: “The full normal act of the gift of wisdom cannot be had without infused contemplation, which is properly called infused in so far as it cannot exist without the special inspiration of the Holy Ghost.”

⁴⁹⁷ *The Imitation of Christ*, Bk. III, chap. 31.

⁴⁹⁸ *The Interior Castle*, fourth mansion, chap. I.

⁴⁹⁹ This is the opinion expressed by Suarez, *De statu perfectionis*, chaps. 11, nos. 15, 16. He admits that St. Augustine and St. Thomas seem to teach clearly that perfection is not only counseled, but commanded by the first precept, as the end toward which all must tend. But he himself replies in the negative: “Respondeo nihilominus si proprie et in rigore loquamur, perfectionem supererogationis non solum non praecipi, ut materiam in quam obligatio praecepti cadat, verum etiam neque per modum finis in praeceptis contineri.” Suarez thus admits, above the precept of the love of God, which in his opinion is limited, counsels of charity superior to those of poverty, chastity, and obedience, virtues which manifestly are inferior to charity. In his opinion, perfection consists, therefore, essentially in these counsels of charity, and instrumentally in the other three which are subordinated as means (cf. *ibid.*, no. 16).

This doctrine of Suarez is criticized at length by the great canonist Passerini, O.P., who was also a profound theologian and most faithful to St. Thomas. Cf. his *De*

hominum statibus et officiis, in *Ila Ilae*, q. 184, a.3, nos. 70, 106, where he shows that this doctrine of Suarez is opposed to that of St. Augustine and of St. Thomas which was preserved by St. Antoninus, Cajetan, and Valentia. St. Thomas occasionally uses the expression “perfection of supererogation,” but in a different sense from that in which Suarez uses it. When St. Thomas uses the phrase, he means that the three evangelical counsels of poverty, absolute chastity, and obedience are not obligatory.

Section 2

The sound basis of Passerini's conclusion will be easily seen by examining St. Thomas' article, *Ila Ilae*, q. 184, a.3, which we are going to translate.

⁵⁰⁰ See *Ila Ilae*, q. 184, a.3, 2a obj.; "Whether perfection consists in the observance of the precepts or of the counsels."

⁵⁰¹ In fact, everyone ought, through charity, to wish for himself salvation, eternal life, and not only an inferior degree of glory, but eternal life without setting any limit; for we do not know to what degree of glory God wishes to raise us.

⁵⁰² St. Augustine means that even the perfection of heaven falls under the precept of the love of God, not as something to be realized immediately, but as the end toward which one must tend. It is thus that Cajetan explains it (Commentary on *Ila Ilae*, q.184, a.3).

⁵⁰³ Summa, *Ila Ilae*, q.184, a.3.

⁵⁰⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁰⁵ This is what our Lord had in mind when He said to the rich young man: If thou wilt be perfect, go sell what thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me" (Matt. 19: 2 I). As St. Thomas remarks (loc. cit., ad mm), this is the road which leads to perfection; and then he explains that perfection consists in following Jesus through love.

⁵⁰⁶ Deut. 6:5; Luke 10:27.

⁵⁰⁷ See *Ia Ilae*, q.64, a.4: "Whether the theological virtues observe the mean."

⁵⁰⁸ Ibid.: "It is possible to find a mean and extremes in theological virtue, accidentally (not essentially) and in reference to us" (i.e., faith is per accidens a mean between incredulity and credulity, hope between despair and presumption).

⁵⁰⁹ Cf. Ernest Hello, *L'homme*, Bk. I, chap. 8: "The truly mediocre man admires everything a little and nothing with warmth.... He considers every affirmation insolent, because every affirmation excludes the contradictory proposition. But if you are slightly friendly and slightly hostile to all things, he will consider you wise and reserved. The mediocre man says there is good and evil in all things, and that we must not be absolute in our judgments. If you strongly affirm the truth, the mediocre man will say that you have too much confidence in yourself. The mediocre man regrets that the Christian religion has dogmas. He would like it to teach only ethics, and if you tell him that its code of morals comes from its dogmas as the consequence comes from the principle, he will answer that you exaggerate.... If the word 'exaggeration' did not exist, the mediocre man would invent it.

"The mediocre man appears habitually modest. He cannot be humble, or he would cease to be mediocre. The humble man scorns all lies, even were they glorified by the whole earth, and he bows the knee before every truth.... If the naturally mediocre man becomes seriously Christian, he ceases absolutely to be mediocre.... The man who loves is never mediocre."

⁵¹⁰ See *Ila Ilae*, q. 184, a.3 ad 3um.

⁵¹¹ Ibid., ad 2um.

⁵¹² This is the opinion of Cajetan (Commentary on *Ila Ilae*, q.184, a.3) and also of Passerini, *De hominum statibus et officiis*, on *Ila Ilae*, q. 184, a. 3, nos.70, 106.

⁵¹³ St. Thomas, loco cit., ad 3um.

⁵¹⁴ *Studiorum ducem*, June 29, 1923: "That the love of God ought always to grow was most certain doctrine. 'This is evident from the very form of the commandment, pointing, as it does, to perfection.... Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart.... The reason of this is that the end of the commandment is charity, according to the Apostle (I Tim. 1:5); and the end is not subject to a measure, but only such things as are directed to the end' (*Ila Ilae*, q. 184, a.3). This is why the perfection of charity toward which every Christian must tend according to his condition, falls under the precept."

⁵¹⁵ Matt. 19:21.

⁵¹⁶ See I John 2: 16.

⁵¹⁷ Ps. 8:6

⁵¹⁸ St. Thomas, Summa, *Ia Ilae*, q. 108, a.4; *Ila Ilae*, q. 186, a.3, 4, 5, 7.

⁵¹⁹ Mark 10:29 f.

⁵²⁰ See *Ila Ilae*, q. 184, a.4.

⁵²¹ Ibid.,a.5.

- [522](#) Phil. 3: 12.
- [523](#) Cf. Salmanticenses, Theol. moralis, IV, De statu religioso, initio, nos. 10–25.
- [524](#) Summa, IIa IIae, q.88, a.6.
- [525](#) Ibid., q. 186, a.7.
- [526](#) Ibid., q. 184, a.5: “For religious bind themselves by vow to refrain from worldly things which they might lawfully use, in order more freely to give themselves to God, wherein consists the perfection of the present life.”
- [527](#) Col. 3: 1–4.
- [528](#) See IIa IIae, q.182, a.4: “The active life precedes the contemplative life because it disposes one to it.”
- [529](#) Ibid., q.152, a.4.
- [530](#) Ibid., q. 184, a. 3: “Primarily and essentially, the perfection of the Christian life consists in charity, principally as to the love of God, secondarily as to the love of our neighbor, both of which are the matter of the chief commandment of the divine law.... Secondarily and instrumentally, however, perfection consists in the observance of the counsels... which are directed to the removal of things that hinder the act of charity.”
- [531](#) Ibid., a.6.
- [532](#) Ibid., a.8.
- [533](#) Ibid., q. 189, a.1 ad 3um; 184, a.7 f.; *Supplement*, q.36, a.1, 3; q.40, a.4.
- [534](#) Ibid., Supplement, q.35, a.1, 2.
- [535](#) Matt. 13: 12.
- [536](#) *The Imitation*, Bk. IV, chap. 5.
- [537](#) See IIa IIae, q. 184, a.8.
- [538](#) *The Imitation*, Bk. IV, chap. 5.
- [539](#) Council of Trent, Sess. XXII, chap. I.
- [540](#) *Summa*, IIa IIae, q. 188, a.6.
- [541](#) Antoine Lestra, *Le Pere Chevrier*, 1935
- [542](#) See II Cor. 12:15.
- [543](#) John 13: 15.
- [544](#) *Ex libro II Officiorum ad S. Fulgendum*, chap. 5.
- [545](#) Ed. Berthier, Rome, 1889.
- [546](#) *Summa*, IIa IIae, q.24. a.9; q. 183, a.4.
- [547](#) See supra, chap. I, §§ 5, 6, 7.
- [548](#) Philip of the Blessed Trinity sets forth the same ideas in the prologue of his *Summa theologiae mysticae* (ed. 1874, p. 17). Many Carmelite theologians think as he does.
- [549](#) *The Dark Night of the Soul*, Bk. I, chaps. 8, 14.
- [550](#) Ibid., Bk. II, chaps. 2, 11.
- [551](#) This is also the division proposed by another Dominican, Giovanni Maria Lauro, in his *Theologia mystica*, published in Naples in 1743.
- [552](#) *The Dark Night of the Soul*, Bk. I, chap. 8.
- [553](#) Ibid., chap. 14.

⁵⁵⁴ *Direttorio mistico*, tr. I, chap. I, no. 10; tr. III, chap. 32.

⁵⁵⁵ See *supra*, chap. 9.

⁵⁵⁶ Matt. 5: 29 *if*.

⁵⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 10:38.

⁵⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 6:6.

⁵⁵⁹ John 3:8; 14: 16,26.

⁵⁶⁰ John 4:23.

⁵⁶¹ See I Cor. 2:6–10.

⁵⁶² Eph. 3: 14–19.

⁵⁶³ We developed these observations in *Les trois conversions et les trois voies*, pp. 1–112.

⁵⁶⁴ Cf. in particular F. Cayre, A.A., *Precis de patrologie*, 1927, in which the spiritual doctrine of the fathers of the Church is set forth *ex professo*, which is quite rare in a work of this type. Cf. I, 19–29, 173 f., 177, 192, 207, 417, 582, 584, 683; II, 355–62, 903–6. See also G. Bardy, *La vie spirituelle d’apres les peres des trois premiers siecles*. 1935.

⁵⁶⁵ Cf. *Epistle to the Romans*, 2,4,5,6,9, *Epistle to the Trallians*, 4 f.

⁵⁶⁶ *Adv. haeres.*, IV, 39; V, 9; IV, 33.

⁵⁶⁷ *Stromata*, VII, 2; PG, IX, 413.

⁵⁶⁸ Eph. 4: 13.

⁵⁶⁹ Cf. PG, IX, 416.

⁵⁷⁰ *Stromata*, II, 7 f.; PG, VIII, 968–76.

⁵⁷¹ *Ibid.*, II, 6; PG, VIII, 960–90.

⁵⁷² *Ibid.*, IV, 5 (PG, VIII, 1233); VI (PG, IX, 292, 325, 328).

⁵⁷³ *Ibid.*, VI, 12 (PG, IX, 325); VII, II (PG, IX, 496).

⁵⁷⁴ *Contra Cels.*, I, 13; VI, 13; PG, XI, 679, 1309; In Levit., 5:3; PG, XII, 452; In Psalm., 26:4; PG, XII, 1279.

⁵⁷⁵ *In Joann.*, 1 :9; 2:3; PG, XIV, 36 f., 113.

⁵⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 1 :6; PG, XIV, 32; *Comm. in Cant. Cant.*, prolog.; PG, XIII, 64–75.

⁵⁷⁷ PG, XIII, 1016–29.

⁵⁷⁸ *In Rom.*, homil. VI, 14; PG, XIV, 1102.

⁵⁷⁹ Cf. Bardy, *Didyme l’Aveugle*, 1910, pp. 157–60.

⁵⁸⁰ PG, XXXI, 889–1051, 1051–1306.

⁵⁸¹ *Oratio 31*, chap. 3.

⁵⁸² *Oratio 40*, chaps. 37 f.: “Lumen efficiamur. Illuminemur oculis, ut recte cernamus.”

⁵⁸³ *Oratio 39*, chap. 8.

⁵⁸⁴ PG, XLIV, 297–430.

⁵⁸⁵ PG, XLVI, 317–416.

- ⁵⁸⁶ PG, XLIV, 297–430.
- ⁵⁸⁷ Published by Weis-Liebersdorf, Leipzig, Teubner, 1912. Quoted at length by Saudreau, *Vie d'union d'après les grands maîtres*, 3rd ed., 1921, pp.52 ff.
- ⁵⁸⁸ Cf. *The Celestial Hierarchy*, III, 2 f. *The Divine Names*, I, 2; IV, 12 f.; VII, 13. *Mystical Theology*, I, 3; II. See also Cayre, *Precis de patrologie*, II, 92–96.
- ⁵⁸⁹ PG, XC, 1441. Cf. Cayre, op. cit., II, 308 ff.
- ⁵⁹⁰ PG, XC, 1209.
- ⁵⁹¹ Ibid., col. 1089.
- ⁵⁹² Ibid., col. 1215. We have assembled elsewhere numerous similar texts from St. Maximus and his predecessors: cf. *Perfection chretienne et contemplation*, II, 668 ff.
- ⁵⁹³ *De Transfigur. Dom.*, 10.
- ⁵⁹⁴ *De virtutibus et vitiis*; PG, XCV, 85–98.
- ⁵⁹⁵ *De Sermone Domini*, I, chaps. 1–4; *De doctrina christiana*, II, chap. 7; Serm. 347.
- ⁵⁹⁶ *De Trinitate*, Bks. XII–XIV.
- ⁵⁹⁷ Father Cayre says quite justly in his *Precis de patrologie*, 1917 (I, 669), in treating of the spirituality of St. Augustine: “St. Thomas will truly remain the disciple of St. Augustine when he presents these graces (of infused contemplation) as the crowning of the entire spiritual organism of the soul, and as destined to subject the soul wholly to God” (Ia IIae, q.68, a. I). Father Ephrem Longpre, O.F.M., says the same thing about St. Bonaventure in *Archivium Franciscanum historicum*, 1911, fasc. I, II, “La theologie mystique de saint Bonaventure.”
- ⁵⁹⁸ See *Ninth Conference*, chaps. 8 ff.
- ⁵⁹⁹ Ibid., chap. 14.
- ⁶⁰⁰ Ibid., chap. 18.
- ⁶⁰¹ *Tenth Conference*, chap. 6.
- ⁶⁰² *Morales*, XXXI, 87.
- ⁶⁰³ Ibid., II, 76 ff.
- ⁶⁰⁴ Ibid., II, 77; VI, 57; XXV, 15; *In Ezech.*, Bk. II, VII, 7.
- ⁶⁰⁵ *Morales*, XXX, 8.
- ⁶⁰⁶ Ibid., VI, 58 f.
- ⁶⁰⁷ *In Ezech.*, Bk. II, II, II.
- ⁶⁰⁸ *Morales*, V, 50 f.; XXII, 50 f.
- ⁶⁰⁹ Ibid., X, 13: “We are inclined toward superior goods when the Spirit touches us with His breath... and then is imprinted in the heart which receives it the traces, as it were, of God’s footsteps.” Cf. Carre, op. cit., II, 242–47.
- ⁶¹⁰ *Morales*, X, 10, no. 17; XXIV, 6, no. 11.
- ⁶¹¹ *In Ezech.*, Bk. II, hom. II, nos. 2 f.
- ⁶¹² *Sermons*, IX, 1–3; XXXII, 2; XLIX, 3.
- ⁶¹³ Ibid., VIII, 6; XXII, 2; XXIII, 16.
- ⁶¹⁴ *Hom. I in Eccl.*
- ⁶¹⁵ *Benjamin Major*, chaps. 1–4, 6.
- ⁶¹⁶ *Itinerarium*, VIII; *De triplici via*, chap. 3; *De apologia pauperum*, chap. 3; *Sermo I de Dom. V post Pascha*. Cf. P. Bonnefoi, O.F.M., *Le Saint-Esprit et les dons selon saint Bonaventure*. 1929, p. 217; E. Longpre, O.F.M., art. cit.

⁶¹⁷ See *Ila Ilae*, q. 24, a.9.

⁶¹⁸ Cf. *supra*, chap. 10.

⁶¹⁹ See *Ila Ilae*, q. 24. a.9.

⁶²⁰ Epist., 34, I; 91, 3; 54, 4: “Not to advance, is to fall back.”

⁶²¹ Ibid.

⁶²² See *Ila Ilae*, q. 24, a.9.

⁶²³ Second Sermon for Lent, and Sermon for the Monday before Palm Sunday (nos. 3 f.), which, in the Latin translation of Surius, is attributed to the first Sunday after the octave of the Epiphany.

⁶²⁴ The Dark Night of the Soul, Bk. I, chaps. 9 f.: “Characteristic signs of the night of the senses.” “How they are to conduct themselves who have entered the dark night.”

⁶²⁵ *La doctrine spirituelle* (Paris, ed. Gabalda, 1908), 2nd principle, chap. 6, a.2, sec. 2, p. 113; cf. pp. 91, 123, 143, 187, 301 ff.

⁶²⁶ The Dark Night, Bk. I, chap. 8.

⁶²⁷ Ibid., chap. 14.

⁶²⁸ Ibid., chap. 9.

⁶²⁹ Ibid., Bk. II, chap. 2.

⁶³⁰ See *Ila Ilae*, q.24. a.9.

⁶³¹ Tauler spoke also of this great purification in the *Sermon for the Monday before Palm Sunday*: no. 7: Trials by which the life of the third degree begins; no. 8: Reason for these trials; no. 9: Divine union in the superior faculties.

⁶³² We developed these ideas at length in a little treatise, *Les trois conversions et les trois voies*, pp. 42–50, 123–80.

⁶³³ The objection has sometimes been raised that this lofty idea of St. John of the Cross notably surpasses the common idea of spiritual writers, and, it has been added, it seems that the beginners who are discussed in The Dark Night (Bk. I, chap. 8) are not those generally spoken of but those who are making a beginning, not in the spiritual life but in the mystical ways. To this objection it is easy to reply that the idea of St. John of the Cross corresponds admirably to the nature of the soul (sensitive and spiritual), no less than to that of grace, and that the beginners he speaks of are indeed those to whom this name is generally given. To be convinced of this, it suffices to see the defects that St. John finds in them: spiritual gluttony, an inclination to sensuality, to anger, to envy, to spiritual laziness, to pride, which leads them, to “go to a stranger to confess their sin, that their usual confessor may think they are not sinners but good people” (The Dark Night, Bk. I, chap.2. Such people are real beginners who have made no progress in asceticism.

When he speaks of the three ways, the purgative, the illuminative, and the unitive, St. John understands them, not in a diminished sense but in their normal plenitude.

It should be noted also that, following several other writers, Father Cayre (*Precis de patrologie, histoire et doctrine des peres et docteurs de l'Eglise*, II, 886 ff.) rightly says: “There is certainly no reason to distinguish in the spirituality of St.. John of ‘the Cross two parallel ways, the one ascetical and the other mystical, each leading by its own means to perfection. The active and the passive ways, spoken of in the two great treatises (*The Ascent* and *The Dark Night*), represent not two distinct states, but two aspects of the one and only way of sanctity.... St. John of the Cross considers the transform of union the normal end of the journey toward perfection.” With this in view, he points out in *The Ascent* what the soul must do, and in *The Dark Night* what it must receive with docility. Several Carmelite theologians have recently made the same observation.

⁶³⁴ In particular, with the table proposed by Father Cayre, op. cit., II, 811, 834.

⁶³⁵ This stage corresponds to the first and second mansions of St. Teresa.

⁶³⁶ As we shall see, it is the third mansion of St. Teresa with a beginning of the arid prayer of quiet.

⁶³⁷ This stage corresponds to the fourth mansion of St. Teresa, and in part to the fifth. In this fifth mansion, we shall see farther on, there are extraordinary graces that do not belong to the normal way of sanctity.

⁶³⁸ St. Teresa speaks of this purification in the sixth mansion.

⁶³⁹ St. Teresa speaks of the various degrees of the infused prayer of union in the fifth, sixth, and seventh mansions.

⁶⁴⁰ Sermon 35.

⁶⁴¹ Rom. 13:13.

⁶⁴² *Confessiones, Soliloquia, De doctrina christiana, De civitate Dei, Epistola 211, Enarrationes in Psalmos, In Sermonem Domini in monte* (Matt. 5), *In Joannem*, etc.

⁶⁴³ *Epistolae*; especially ep. 22, to the virgin Eustochium.

⁶⁴⁴ *Collationes*.

⁶⁴⁵ *Sermones*.

⁶⁴⁶ *Rule*.

⁶⁴⁷ *Expositio in librum Job, sive moralium libri XXXV; Liber regulae pastoralis; Homiliae in Ezechielem*.

⁶⁴⁸ *De Spiritu Sancto; Regulae*.

⁶⁴⁹ *Homiliae, De sacerdotio*.

⁶⁵⁰ *De divinis nominibus; De ecclesiastica hierarchia; De mystica theologia*.

⁶⁵¹ Especially his *Commentaries* on Dionysius, his *Liber asceticus*.

⁶⁵² *Cur Deus homo*. His meditations and prayers are rich in doctrine and unction.

⁶⁵³ *Sermones de tempore, de sanctis, in Cantica Canticorum; De consideratione; De gradibus humilitatis et superbiae; De diligendo Deo*.

⁶⁵⁴ *Benjamin minor, seu de preparatione ad contemplationem; Benjamin major, seu de gratia contemplationis; Expositio in Cantica Canticorum*.

⁶⁵⁵ *De vita spirituali; Ex commentariis B. Hugonis de Sancto Charo, O.P., super totam bibliam excerpta*, Currante Fr. Dionysio Mesard, O.P., Pustet, 1910. An excellent work divided into four parts: on the purgative life; on the illuminative life; the unitive life; the spiritual life of priests.

⁶⁵⁶ *Commentarii in S. Scripturam*, especially *In Joannem; Comm. in Dionysium; Mariale; De sacrificio missae*.

⁶⁵⁷ *Commentarii in Psalmos, in Job, in Canticum Canticorum, in Matth.; in Joannem; in Epist. S. Pauli; In Summa theologica, IIa IIae, de virtutibus theologicis et moralibus nec non de donis in speciali. De perfectione spirituali; Officium SS. Sacramenti; Expositio in Symbol. Apost. et in Orationem dominicam*.

⁶⁵⁸ *De triplici via (seu Incendium amoris); Lignum vitae; Vitis mystica, Itinerarium mentis ad Deum; Breviloquium*.

⁶⁵⁹ *Dialogue; Letters*.

⁶⁶⁰ *Sermons*; critical edition in German by Vetter, 1910. The Institutions were not drawn up by Tauler, but contain the summary of his doctrine.

⁶⁶¹ Die Schriften der heiligen H. Suso, published by Father Denifle, O.P.

⁶⁶² *Visionum et instructionum liber*. This book speaks especially of the divine transcendence and of Christ's passion.

⁶⁶³ *OEuvres* (trans. from the Flemish by the Benedictines of St. Paul at Wisque). Cf. especially *Le miroir du salut éternel; Le livre des sept clôtures; L'ornement des nocces éternelles*. Ruysbroeck is certainly one of the greatest mystics, but he can be comprehended only by advanced souls.

⁶⁶⁴ Cf. especially *A Book of Spiritual Instruction* (tr. by Bertrand Wilberforce, O.P.), which contains the substance of his other writings. Louis Blosius wrote a defense of Tauler's doctrine, which he explained in a way that renders it more accessible.

⁶⁶⁵ *Abecedario espiritual*, 1528. See especially Vol. III, which served as a guide to St. Teresa.

⁶⁶⁶ *The Spiritual Exercises*, a method to reform and transform the soul by conforming it to the divine Model. See also *The Tale of the Pilgrim* and the *Letters of St. Ignatius Loyola*.

⁶⁶⁷ *Obras de Santa Teresa, editadas y anotadas por el P. Silverio de S. Teresa*, 6 vols., Burgos, 1915–20; *Letters of St. Teresa*. All interior souls can and should read *The Way of Perfection* by St. Teresa.

⁶⁶⁸ *Obras de San Juan de la Cruz*, edited by P. Silverio, 5 vols., Burgos, 1929–31.

In these works, *The Ascent of Mount Carmel* shows especially the active purification of the soul which prepares for contemplation and which must continue with it. *The Dark Night* describes, together with the defects of beginners, the passive purification of the senses and that of the spirit. *The Living Flame of Love* describes what is lofty in the life of union. *A Spiritual Cantic* sums up in a lyrical form the doctrine of the other works.

⁶⁶⁹ *Oeuvres* published by the Religious of the Visitation of Annecy. *The Introduction to a Devout Life* describes the purgative life and shows how devotion and sanctity may be practiced in all states of life. *The Treatise on the Love of God* lifts souls even to the unitive way. *Les vrais entretiens spirituels*, composed for the Visitandines, do good to all religious souls.

⁶⁷⁰ Oeuvres, 12 vols., Paris, 1905. Disciple of Berulle and of Condren, St. John Eudes links up the interior virtues with the devotion to the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary. One should read *La vie et le royaume de Jesus dans les ames chretiennes*; *Le coeur admirable de la Mere de Dieu*; *Le memorial de la vie ecclesiastique*.

⁶⁷¹ *Elevations sur les mysteres*; *Meditations sur l'Evangile*; *Traite de la concupiscence*; *Lettres de direction*; *Les etats d'oraison*.

⁶⁷² *The Sinners' Guide*; *Memorial of the Christian Life*.

⁶⁷³ *La croix de Jesus*, new ed., 1937; *Les meditations sur la Passion*.

⁶⁷⁴ *Le plus parfait (abandonment)*; *La presence de Dieu*; *L'oraison du coeur*; *Etat du pur amour*; *La clef du pur amour*; *La vie cachee*.

⁶⁷⁵ *Traite de la veritable oraison*, ed. Rousset (1900); *Meditations de saint Thomas sur les trois voies*, ed. Florand (1934).

⁶⁷⁶ *Guide spirituel*; *De la perfection du chretien en tous les etats*; *De la perfection du chretien dans l'etat ecclesiastique*; *Meditations sur les mysteres de notre foi*.

⁶⁷⁷ *La doctrine spirituelle*, a very substantial work which shows how, by purity of heart, docility to the Holy Ghost, the frequent and loving remembrance of God present in it, the soul reaches contemplation, an act of living faith enlightened by the gifts.

⁶⁷⁸ *Les fondements de la vie spirituelle*; *La guide spirituelle*, in which the doctrine of Father Lallemant is developed; *Traite de l'amour de Dieu*.

⁶⁷⁹ *Abandon a la divine Providence*, an admirable book which has done great good to many souls; *Instructions spirituelles sur les divers etats d'oraison*.

⁶⁸⁰ *Maximes spirituelles*; *Meditations en forme de retraite sur l'amour de Dieu*; *Retraite spirituelle*; *Manuel des ames interieures*. The doctrine set forth in these works is identical with that of Father Lallemant.

⁶⁸¹ Oeuvres completes, 1657 and 1856. Cf. especially *Le discours de l'etat et des grandeurs de Jesus*.

⁶⁸² *L'idee du sacerdoce et du sacrifice*. Condren completes Berulle, by showing in Jesus, the adorer of the Father, the principal priest of the sacrifice to which we ought daily to unite ourselves.

⁶⁸³ *Verites et excellences de Jesus-Christ* (meditations).

⁶⁸⁴ *Correspondance*; *Entretiens*, published by Father Coste, 1910.

⁶⁸⁵ Le catechisme chretien pour la vie interieure (the crucifying virtues, the way of close union with our Lord); *La journee chretienne*; *Le traite des Saints-Ordres*; *L'introduction a la vie et aux vertus chretiennes*.

⁶⁸⁶ *Le regne de Dieu en l'oraison mentale*.

⁶⁸⁷ *Traite de la vraie devotion a la Sainte Vierge*; *Le secret de Marie*.

⁶⁸⁸ *Opere ascetique*, new ed., Rome, 1933. Various editions in English.

⁶⁸⁹ St. Benedict (Rule, chap. 48) says that reading thus made is the first degree of the ascending series: "Reading, thought, study, meditation, prayer, contemplation." Cf. Dam Delatte, *The Rule of St. Benedict* (a commentary); tr. by Dam Justin McCann, 1921.

St. Thomas, who received his first training with the Benedictines, kept this gradation which ends in contemplation (cf. IIa. IIae, q.180, a.3)

⁶⁹⁰ "When reading, let him seek not so much learning as savor." *In spec. monach.*

⁶⁹¹ Rom.2: 13. Jas. 1: 22: "Be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only."

⁶⁹² Luke 8:8, 15.

⁶⁹³ *Testem benevolentiae*, January 22, 1899.

⁶⁹⁴ Acts 9:6.

⁶⁹⁵ *Sermo de abd. rer.*

⁶⁹⁶ See *I Cap. Isaiae*.

⁶⁹⁷ *Sermo 112 de temp.*

⁶⁹⁸ *Collationes*, II, 14 f., 24.

- ⁶⁹⁹ Ibid., II, 2, 5, 7, 10.
- ⁷⁰⁰ *De diversis, sermo VIII*, 7
- ⁷⁰¹ *Epist.* 87, no. 7.
- ⁷⁰² *Life of St. Teresa by Herself*, chap. 13.
- ⁷⁰³ *Sentences et avis spirituels*, no. 229.
- ⁷⁰⁴ *Introduction to a Devout Life*, Part III, chap. 28.
- ⁷⁰⁵ Ibid.
- ⁷⁰⁶ *St. John of the Cross, The Dark Night of the Soul*, Bk. I, chaps. 1–7: Defects of Beginners: inclination to pride, spiritual gluttony, envy, anger, sloth.
- ⁷⁰⁷ St. Teresa (*The Interior Castle*, fourth mansion, chap. 2) teaches us also clearly to distinguish between the divine tastes produced by infused contemplation and the satisfactions or consolations of active prayer. The divine delights come directly from the action of God; consolations, from our activity aided by grace: “When His Majesty wills to bestow on us any supernatural favors, we experience the greatest peace, calm, and sweetness in the inmost depths of our being.” Moreover, the effects are not less different than their origin. “No sooner has this heavenly water begun to issue from its source... than it seems to expand us and enlarge us internally, and benefit us in an inexplicable manner; nor does even the soul itself understand what it receives. It is conscious of what may be described as a certain fragrance, as if within its inmost depths were a brazier sprinkled with sweet perfumes.” The Lord wishes thus to make the soul know that He is very close to it. To confound sensible consolations with these divine delights would be a grievous mistake.
- ⁷⁰⁸ *The Dark Night*, Bk. I, chap. 9.
- ⁷⁰⁹ At the beginning of Part III: Entrance into the Illuminative Way (The Night of the Senses).
- ⁷¹⁰ Cf. St. John of the Cross, *The Dark Night of the Soul*, Bk. II, chap. 2: Certain Imperfections of Proficients.
- ⁷¹¹ Cf. the Prologue of *The Ascent of Mount Carmel* and the sketch placed by the saint at the beginning of this work.
- ⁷¹² *Life*, chap. 13: “They who walk in the way of prayer have the greater need of learning; and the more spiritual they are, the greater is that need.”
- ⁷¹³ Cf. *infra*, Part IV: The Entrance into the Unitive Way (The Night of the Spirit).
- ⁷¹⁴ *Introduction to a Devout Life*, Part I, chap. 4.
- ⁷¹⁵ Cf. *Life*, chap. 13: “It is of great consequence that the director should be prudent—I mean, of sound understanding—and a man of experience. If, in addition to this, he is a learned man, it is a very great matter. But if these three qualities cannot be had together, the first two are the most important, because learned men may be found with whom we can communicate when it is necessary. I mean, that for beginners learned men are of little use, if they are not men of prayer. I do not say that they are to have nothing to do with learned men.... Learning is a great thing.... From silly devotions, God deliver us!”
- ⁷¹⁶ The study of psychology is particularly necessary for him when he has to direct persons affected with hysteria, psychasthenia, or neurasthenia. He should also know what mental troubles come from certain maladies, such as Basedow’s disease (hypertrophy of the thyroid glands) and other disorders in the functioning of the endocrine glands, especially at the critical age. Such disorders may give rise to a chronic and progressive intoxication, which engenders some mental confusion accompanied by fixed ideas.
- Cf. Robert de Sinety, S.J., *Psychopathologie et direction* (Paris, Beauchesne, 1934). The author mentions also religious psychopathology, the precursory symptoms of psychopathy, and offers practical advice for the direction of psychopaths.
- ⁷¹⁷ St. Francis de Sales, *Introduction to a Devout Life*, Part I, chap. 4.
- ⁷¹⁸ Ibid.
- ⁷¹⁹ Matt. 7:24–27.
- ⁷²⁰ Summa, IIa IIae, q.24. a.9.
- ⁷²¹ Matt. 7:3.
- ⁷²² Cf. IIa IIae, q.180, a.6.
- ⁷²³ See I Cor. 3: 1 f.
- ⁷²⁴ *The Dark Night of the Soul*, Bk. I, chaps. 1–7.
- ⁷²⁵ In others they reappear in regard to the things of the intellectual life, by unconscious self-seeking in study.

- [726](#) *The Dark Night of the Soul*, Bk. I, chap. 8.
- [727](#) Ibid., chap. 14.
- [728](#) Ibid., chap. 9: The three signs of the passive purification of the senses, in which infused contemplation begins.
- [729](#) *Dialogue*, chap. 53.
- [730](#) John 4:34.
- [731](#) *In Matthaeum* 5:6.
- [732](#) Isa. 55: 1.
- [733](#) See II Cor. 9:7.
- [734](#) St. Thomas, *In Joannem* 7:37: “All this is spiritual refection in the knowledge of divine wisdom and truth; likewise, in the fulfilling of desires.... Moreover, the fruit of this invitation is the overflowing of good on others.”
- [735](#) John 7: 38.
- [736](#) St. Thomas, *In Matth.* 7: 14.
- [737](#) *The Way of Perfection*, chap. 19.
- [738](#) Stanza 2.
- [739](#) St. Thomas says (IIa IIae, q.129, a.4, c. and ad 3um) that magnanimity leads a man to wish to practice all the virtues with true greatness of soul. It is thus like the ornament of all the virtues, and one sees thereby its general influence, that indeed attributed by spiritual authors to generosity. Ibid., q.134, a.2 ad 3um; and Ia IIae, q.66, a.4 ad 3um.
- [740](#) Phil. 1:6.
- [741](#) Luke 9:62.
- [742](#) John 12:24f.
- [743](#) Cf. Denzinger, *Enchiridion*, nos. 1967 ff., 2104.
- [744](#) See II Cor. 4: 10
- [745](#) Denzinger, nos. 1211 f.
- [746](#) Ibid., no. 1224 f.
- [747](#) Ibid., no 1226.
- [748](#) Ibid., nos. 1227–29, 1232.
- [749](#) Ibid., no. 1233 f.
- [750](#) Ibid., no. 1234.
- [751](#) Ibid., no. 1257.
- [752](#) Ibid., no. 1258.
- [753](#) Ibid., no. 1243.
- [754](#) Ibid., no. 1246.
- [755](#) Ibid., nos. 1257–66.
- [756](#) Ibid., nos. 1275–86.
- [757](#) Cf. Denzinger, no. 1268: “Hujusmodi violentiae (daemonis) sunt medium magis proportionatum ad annihilandam animam et ad eam ad veram transformationem et

unionem perducendam”; no. 1268: “Melius est ea non confiteri; quia non sunt peccata, nec etiam venialia.”

⁷⁵⁸ On these aberrations of the quietists, see the work of Father Dudon, S.J., *Michel Molinos*. The author makes it clear that one of the principal errors of the Spanish quietists was to consider the prayer of quiet as acquired at will (by the suppression of acts), whereas in reality it is infused, as St. Teresa points out (fifth mansion). They thus simulated infused prayer before having received it, and they completely disfigured it by suppressing all asceticism.

⁷⁵⁹ Cf. Denzinger, nos. 1094, 1291, 1298.

⁷⁶⁰ Ibid., no. 1309: “Homo debet agere tota vita poenitentiam pro peccato originali.”

⁷⁶¹ Ibid., no. 1313: “Arcendi sunt a sacra communione, quibus nondum illest amor Dei purissimus et omnis mixtionis expers.”

⁷⁶² It has been said of Pascal that throughout his life he thought of sanctity without ever attaining it, because he remained in his own presence instead of in the presence of God.

⁷⁶³ By wishing, first of all, to enjoy this world, by fleeing purifying suffering and duty, which at times are painful.

⁷⁶⁴ “For he that shall lose his life,” by sacrificing it in the accomplishment of duty out of love for Me, “shall save it.”

⁷⁶⁵ Luke 9:23–25.

⁷⁶⁶ Matt. 5:20.

⁷⁶⁷ Ibid., 48.

⁷⁶⁸ Ibid., 23 f.

⁷⁶⁹ Ibid., 29 f.

⁷⁷⁰ St. Thomas, IIa IIae, q. 147 (Of fasting).

⁷⁷¹ Matt. 5:38 f.

⁷⁷² Ibid., 39 f.

⁷⁷³ Cf. St. Thomas, *In Matth.*, 5:40.

⁷⁷⁴ Matt. 5:41 f.

⁷⁷⁵ Ibid., 7:1.

⁷⁷⁶ Ibid., 6: 1–19.

⁷⁷⁷ Ibid., 16–18.

⁷⁷⁸ See I Cor. 9:27.

⁷⁷⁹ Gal 1:5:24f.

⁷⁸⁰ St. Thomas, in IIIa, q. 85, a. 2 f., says that penance is a special virtue which labors to efface sin and its consequences, inasmuch as sin is an offense against God. Wherefore penance is a part of justice, and, inspired by charity, it commands other subordinate virtues, in particular temperance, as exemplified in fasting, abstinence, vigils. A distinction may be made between mortification, properly so called, which depends on the virtue of penance, and mortification in the broad sense, which depends on each virtue, inasmuch as each one rejects the vices that are contrary to it. Correctly speaking, we cannot repent of original sin, but we should labor to diminish those of its results which incline us to personal sin.

⁷⁸¹ Rom. 5:12.

⁷⁸² Ibid., 19–21.

⁷⁸³ Gal 1:5:16f.

⁷⁸⁴ Eph. 4:21–24.

⁷⁸⁵ Col. 3:9 f.

⁷⁸⁶ Rom. 7: 22–24. The meaning is: who will deliver me from the law of sin which is in my members, and consequently from spiritual or eternal death. As has often been pointed out, the idea of deliverance by physical death is foreign to the context.

⁷⁸⁷ Council of Trent (Denzinger, no. 789): “Adam accepit a Deo sanctitatem et iustitiam non sibi soli sed etiam nobis perdidit.”

⁷⁸⁸ St. Thomas, Ia IIae, q.83, a.3: “Two things must be considered in the infection of original sin. First, its inherence to its subject; and in this respect it regards first the essence of the soul... In the second place, we must consider its inclination to act; and in this way it regards the powers of the soul. It must therefore regard first of all that power in which is seated the first inclination to commit a sin, and this is the will.” Ia IIae, q.85, a.3: “In so far as the will is deprived of its order to the good, there is the wound of malice.” Ibid., ad 2um: “Malice is not to be taken here as a sin, but as a certain proneness of the will to evil, according to Gen. 8:21: ‘Man’s senses are prone to evil from his youth.’” (Vulg.: The imagination and thought of man’s heart are prone to evil from his youth.)

⁷⁸⁹ Ibid.: “Hence, in so far as the reason is deprived of its order to the true, there is the wound of ignorance.”

⁷⁹⁰ Ibid.: “In so far as the irascible (appetite) is deprived of its order to the arduous, there is the wound of weakness; and in so far as the concupiscible (appetite) is deprived of its order to the delectable, moderated by reason, here is the wound of concupiscence. Accordingly, these are the four wounds inflicted on the whole of human nature as a result of our first parent’s sin.”

⁷⁹¹ *The Imitation*, Bk. III, chap. 54.

⁷⁹² See Ia IIae, q.77, a.4: “Inordinate love of self is the cause of every sin.” We explained elsewhere at greater length the Thomistic doctrine of the consequences of original sin in relation to the spiritual life. Cf. *L’amour de Dieu et la croix de Jesus*, I, 292 ff.

⁷⁹³ If man had been created in a purely natural state (or of pure nature), he would be born with a will not turned away from God, but capable of turning freely toward Him (Author of our nature and of the natural moral law) or of turning away from Him. There is, therefore, a notable difference between this state and that in which man is actually born. As a result of original sin, our powers to observe the natural moral law are less than they would have been in a state of pure nature. This is why, without the aid of healing grace, we cannot succeed in efficaciously loving God, the Author of our nature, more than ourselves.

⁷⁹⁴ St. Thomas, Ia IIae, q.109, a. 3: “In the state of corrupt nature man falls short of this (of the efficacious love of God, the Author of nature) in the appetite of his rational will, which, unless it is cured by God’s grace, follows its private good, on account of the corruption of nature.” See also, *De malo*, q.4, a.2; q.5, a.2; *De veritate*, q.24, a.12 ad 2um.

⁷⁹⁵ St. Thomas, *Contra Gentes*, Bk. IV, chap. 42, no. 3: “Considering divine providence and the dignity of the superior part of human nature, it can with sufficient probability be proved that defects of this kind are penalties; and thus it can be concluded that the human race is somewhat infected by original sin.”

⁷⁹⁶ See I John 2: 16.

⁷⁹⁷ Cf. IIIa, q.69, a.3 ad 3um: “Original sin spread in this way, that at first the person infected the nature, and afterward the nature infected the person. Whereas Christ in reverse order at first repairs what regards the person, and afterward will simultaneously repair what pertains to the nature in all men. Consequently, by baptism He takes away from man forthwith the guilt of original sin and the punishment of being deprived of the heavenly vision. But the penalties of the present life, such as death, hunger, thirst, and the like, pertain to the nature, from the principles of which they arise, inasmuch as it is deprived of original justice. Therefore these defects will not be taken away until the ultimate restoration of nature through the glorious resurrection.”

Ibid., in corp. a. 3: “Wherefore a Christian receives grace in baptism, as to his soul; but he retains a passible body, so that he may suffer for Christ therein (Rom. 7: II, 17).... Secondly, this is suitable for our spiritual training: namely, in order that, by fighting against concupiscence and other defects to which he is subject, man may receive the crown of victory” (Rom. 6:6).

The Council of Trent (Denzinger, no. 792) says that baptism remits original sin perfectly by giving us habitual grace and the infused virtues, but that in the baptized the “coal of concupiscence” remains, which is left *ad agonem* (for the struggle) and which cannot harm those who do not consent to it and who struggle manfully by the grace of Christ.

⁷⁹⁸ Rom. 6:6, 12.

⁷⁹⁹ Ibid., 8:4 f.

⁸⁰⁰ Gal. s: 13–24.

⁸⁰¹ Cf. St. Thomas, IIIa, q.86, a.5.

⁸⁰² Cf. Ia IIae, q.77, a.4 f.; q.84, a.4.

⁸⁰³ See IIIa, q.85, a.3; Ia IIae, q.87, a. 1,3–5.

⁸⁰⁴ Cf. IIIa, q.86, a.4 ad 2um; Suppl., q.10, a.2 ad 2um.

⁸⁰⁵ Luke 7:47.

⁸⁰⁶ Cf. Ia IIae, q.63, a.4: “In the consumption of food, the proper measure is fixed by human reason so that it should not harm the health of the body, and should not hinder the use of reason: whereas, according to the divine rule, it behoves man to chastise his body, and bring it into subjection (I Cor. 9:27) by abstinence in the matter of food and drink and the like.... Those infused moral virtues, whereby men behave well in respect of their being fellow citizens with the saints, and of the household (Douay, domestics) of God (Eph. 2:19), differ from the acquired virtues, whereby man behaves well in respect of human affairs.”

⁸⁰⁷ Eph. 6:11 f., 14f.

[808](#) Matt. 17:20: “But this kind is not cast out but by prayer and fasting.” Cf. St. Thomas, IIIa, suppl., q. 15, a.3.

[809](#) Matt. 5:48.

[810](#) Col. 3: 1–3,5,8.

[811](#) Eph. 2: 18–22.

[812](#) See I Cor. 7:29–31.

[813](#) See II Tim. 2:4.

[814](#) Luke 9:23; 14:27; Matt. 9:38; Mark 8:34.

[815](#) Rom. 8: 14, 17 f.

[816](#) Cf. II Cor. 4:7–10, 12.

[817](#) Cf. I Cor. 4:9. 12 f.

[818](#) Acts 5:41.

[819](#) Cf. Ia IIae, q.77, a.4 f.; q.84, a.4.

[820](#) Moral., Bk. XXXI, chap. 17.

[821](#) See Ia IIae, q.77, a.4 f.; q.84, a.4.

[822](#) For St. Gregory and St. Thomas, vainglory is the first of the capital sins.

[823](#) St. Gregory and St. Thomas use the term, *acedia*, that is, evil sadness which embitters.

[824](#) *The City of God*, Bk. XIV, chap. 28.

[825](#) Cf. St. Thomas, loco cit.

[826](#) John 12:25.

[827](#) Cf. I John 2:16.

[828](#) See Ia IIae, q.77, a.5.

[829](#) Ibid., q. 73, a. 5: “Spiritual sins are of greater guilt than carnal sins.... Spiritual sin denotes more a turning from something.... Sins of intemperance are most worthy of reproach... because by these sins man is, so to speak, brutalized.”

[830](#) Cf. Ibid., q.84, a.4.

[831](#) Rom. 8: 13. Cf. Col. 3:5.

[832](#) *The Dark Night of the Soul*, Bk. I, chaps. 2–8.

[833](#) Cf. Denzinger, nos. 1230 f.

[834](#) See Ia IIae, q.76–78.

[835](#) Ps. 6: 3.

[836](#) St. Thomas (Ia IIae, q.58, a.5; q.57, a.5 ad 3um; q.77, a.2) recalls on this subject the Aristotelian principle: “Such as a man is, such does the end seem to him... for the virtuous man judges aright of the end of virtue.” Whence the adage: “I see the better and approve it, I follow the worse.”

[837](#) Cf. ibid., q.77, a.6.

[838](#) Ibid., a.8.

[839](#) Ibid., ad 1um.

[840](#) Council of Trent, Sess. VI, chap. 11(Denzinger, no. 804), from St. Augustine, *De natura et gratia*, chap. 41, no. 50.

[841](#) Matt. 10: 28.

[842](#) Our individual temperament is generally quite determined along one line, according to the principle, *natura determinatur ad unum*. This is why it must be perfected by the different virtues, which will permit us to act in a reasonable and Christian manner, under different circumstances, in relation to different people: for example, in relation to superiors, inferiors, and equals, and according to the various situations in which we are placed.

[843](#) Matt. 13:24f.

[844](#) Ibid., 39.

[845](#) St. Thomas would see in this an application of the principle formulated by Aristotle, which the saint quotes often: Qualis unusquisque est, talis finis videtur ei; that is, “Every man judges of what is good according to his good or evil interior dispositions.”

[846](#) John 8: 34.

[847](#) Mark 3:17.

[848](#) Luke 9:55 f.

[849](#) See I John 3: 18, 23.

[850](#) Cf. IIa IIae, q.82, a. 1 f.

[851](#) Council of Trent, Sess. VI, chap. 2.

[852](#) Luke 10:27.

[853](#) Sloth is one of the predominant faults most difficult to overcome. However, success is possible with the help of grace.

[854](#) Cfr. Ia IIae, q.22–28.

[855](#) Ibid., q.22, a.3.

[856](#) Cf. Bossuet, *De la connaissance de Dieu et de soi-meme*, chap. I, § 6.

[857](#) John 2:15.

[858](#) Cf. Ia IIae. Q.24. a.3.

[859](#) Cf. ibid.

[860](#) Cf. IIIa, q. 15. a.4–7, 9.

[861](#) Rom. 12: 15.

[862](#) Exod. 32: 19.

[863](#) Chap. 2.

[864](#) See IIa IIae, q.53, a.3; q.54. a. I ad 2um.

[865](#) Mark 3:17.

[866](#) Matt. 26: 33 f.

[867](#) Cf. supra, chaps. 19 f.

[868](#) Cf. Bk. I, chaps. 4–12.

[869](#) Cf. Bk. I, chaps. 11 ff.

[870](#) We treated elsewhere at length of imperfection in so far as it is distinct from venial sin: cf. *L'amour de Dieu et la croix de Jesus*, Vol. I, Part II, chap. 6, pp. 360–90: “The lesser good is not an evil, but every man, according to his condition, must tend toward the perfection of charity.”” Cf. Salmanticenses, *Cursus theol., De peccatis*, disp. 19, dub. I, nos. 8 f.; *De Incarnatione*, in IIIam P., S. Thomae, q.15, a. I. They show clearly that in our Lord there was neither venial sin nor imperfection, and they distinguish clearly between them.

⁸⁷¹ Cf. *The Ascent of Mount Carmel*. At the beginning of this work, St. John of the Cross placed a picture which shows the narrow path of perfection, then, far off, the road of the imperfect spirit and the road of the lost spirit.

⁸⁷² Matt. 5:29.

⁸⁷³ St. Thomas, IIa IIae, q.153, a.5.

⁸⁷⁴ Cf. I Cor. 9:27.

⁸⁷⁵ With this end in view, the Church prescribes certain days of fast and abstinence; with the same purpose, the founders of religious orders established certain special austerities, such as vigils, the discipline, and perpetual abstinence from meat. The saints do not deprive themselves of these means of preserving the perfection of absolute chastity. St. Dominic used to scourge himself three times every night: once, to expiate his own faults; a second time, for those of sinners; and a third, for the souls in purgatory. He consecrated the night to prayer and penance: he slept little, rarely before Matins, and never went to bed afterward. He used to go from one altar to another in the church, praying now on his knees, his arms extended or lifted like arrows above his head, now bowed over or prostrate on the ground. When sleep overcame him, he would lie down on the flagstones or rest his head against an altar. In his life this personal immolation was the accompaniment of the Sacrifice of the Mass, in which our Savior's immolation is continued in a sacramental manner.

Doubtless such mortification presupposes exceptional graces; but there are certain austerities that we can all practice instead of seeking our comfort. For example, the habit of taking the discipline preserves us from many faults, keeps alive the love of austerity, expiates many negligences, and helps us to deliver souls from the bonds they have made for themselves. In a religious order the observances are a little like what the bark is to the tree: if the bark is peeled from a vigorous oak, the sap no longer rises, the tree withers and dies. The saints say: "If you mitigate observances, you relax souls," which will no longer have the enthusiasm needed to run in the way of perfection.

⁸⁷⁶ Cf. IIa IIae, q. 35, a. I ad 4um.

⁸⁷⁷ However, it is generally admitted that if by reason of a duty of state certain studies must be made which may produce some inordinate movement of sensuality, they can be made for a virtuous motive though it is foreseen that some so to speak material disorder may arise, which one does not directly wish to experience. Theologians teach in fact: "Carnal delectation, indirectly voluntary or not voluntary in itself but only in its cause, is not always a sin. There is often lacking the proximate danger of future consent, when the act placed is in itself upright and reasonable (as a surgical operation, or the reading of a book on medicine) from which one foresees but does not intend any carnal delectation."

⁸⁷⁸ Bk. I, chap. 6–8.

⁸⁷⁹ Cf. chap. 4.

⁸⁸⁰ St. John of the Cross, *The Dark Night of the Soul*, Bk. I, chap. 4: "Some, too, form spiritual friendships with others, the source of which is luxury and not spirituality. We may know it to be so by observing whether the remembrance of that affection increases our recollection and love of God, or brings remorse of conscience."

St. Francis de Sales, *Introduction to a Devout Life*, Part III, chap. 21, says on the subject of frivolous friendships, that radical measures must be taken to triumph over them: "Cut them, break them, tear them; do not amuse yourself in unraveling these criminal friendships; you must tear and rend them asunder; do not untie the knots, but break or cut them." In order the better to succeed, a person must divert himself by becoming absorbed in the duties of his state.

In regard to friendships in which there is a mingling of the natural and the supernatural, St. Francis. de Sales says again (ibid., chap: 20):. "They begin with virtuous love, but if they do not use the utmost discretion, fond love will begin to mingle itself in it, then sensual love, and afterwards carnal love: yea, there is even danger in spiritual love, if we are not extremely on our guard; though in this it is more difficult to be imposed upon, because its purity and whiteness make the spots and stains which Satan seeks to mingle with it more apparent, and therefore, when he takes this in hand, he does it more subtly, and endeavors to introduce impurities by almost insensible degrees.

If in a friendship of this kind, the supernatural element dominates, the friendship may be kept through purifying it by the custody and mortification of the senses and the heart, if, on the contrary, the sensible element predominates, every particular relation over and above necessary meetings must be renounced for a considerable time. This is the teaching of all the masters.

⁸⁸¹ Since ordinary gluttony leads, as St. Gregory says, to improper pleasantries, buffoonery, foolish talking, stupidity, and impurity (d. St. Thomas, IIa IIae, q. 148, a. 5 f.), spiritual gluttony, as St. John of the Cross points out (*The Dark Night*, Bk. I. chap. 6), has analogous effects in a less inferior order.

It is, he says, very frequent in beginners: "Many beginners, delighting in the sweetness and joy of their spiritual occupations, strive after spiritual sweetness rather than after pure and true devotion." In order to procure sensible consolations they sometimes take upon themselves, contrary to obedience, indiscreet penances which ruin their health and wear them out. The devil deceives them in this. They are afflicted because their director does not approve of them, and are like children guided by their tastes and sensuality, and not their reason; they pay little heed to their wretchedness and lose sight of the fear of God. Consequently, they need to be weaned from these sensible consolations to which they are too greatly attached; their sensible appetites must be purged, purified that they may be apt for a true spiritual life incontestably dominated by the spirit.

True devotion is the promptness of the will in the service of God (cf. St. Thomas, IIa IIae, q.82, a. I); sensible devotion is accidental or accessory, useful only on condition that we do not attribute too much importance to it. The Lord deprives us of it in order to purify us if we take too great pleasure in it. "How," says St. John of the Cross (ibid.), "can one fail to understand that the least of the blessings of Eucharistic Communion is that which touches the senses, and that the invisible grace it confers is far greater; for God frequently withholds the sensible favors from men, that they may fix the eyes of faith upon Himself."

⁸⁸² On this subject, St. John of the Cross (*The Dark Night*, Bk. I, chap. 4) speaks of what he calls "spiritual luxury," that is, involuntary impure movements which are produced in beginners during affective prayer or the reception of the sacraments. Ordinarily these movements come from interior joy overflowing on the sensibility which is not yet sufficiently under control and purified. These rebellions, says the saint, also come occasionally from the devil, who wishes to disturb and trouble the soul in order to make it abandon spiritual exercises. He adds that fear of the return of these movements may become their cause, and that very delicate temperaments experience them under the influence of different emotions.

According to St. John of the Cross, these involuntary movements of sensuality are not sins as long as the will, far from consenting to them, resists them. They are an imperfection of beginners. But they must not be confused with indirectly voluntary movements of sensuality, which could come, for example, from too great familiarity that would distort a spiritual friendship,

⁸⁸³ See I John 4: 1.

⁸⁸⁴ Matt. 5: 21–25.

⁸⁸⁵ Ibid., 39 f.

⁸⁸⁶ Ibid., 44–48.

⁸⁸⁷ *The Dark Night*, Bk. I, chap. 5.

⁸⁸⁸ Ibid., St. John of the Cross observes: “When this natural feeling of displeasure is not permitted to grow, there is no sin, but only imperfection, which will have to be purged away in the severity and aridities of the dark night.” The Spanish text reads: “No hay culpa, sino imperfeccion.” This statement shows, like what was said in chapter 4 of certain involuntary movements of sensuality, that St. John of the Cross distinguished between imperfection and venial sin, which supposes at least negligence in repressing the disorder of the sensible appetites. For this disorder to be a sin, it must be voluntary, at least in an indirect manner, that is, it is at least necessary that a person could and should have foreseen it and prevented it. St. Thomas spoke in the same way (Ia IIae, q.80, a.3 ad 3um): “The lusting of the flesh against the spirit, when the reason actually resists it, is not a sin, but is matter for the exercise of virtue.” Cf. ibid., IIa IIae, q.154, a.5; *De malo*, q.7, a.6 ad 6um.

⁸⁸⁹ Matt. 16:24; Luke 9:23.

⁸⁹⁰ Luke 10:27.

⁸⁹¹ Cf. St. Thomas, Ia, q.78, a.4; q.84, a.7.

⁸⁹² *The Interior Castle*, fifth mansion, chap. 4; sixth mansion, chap. I.

⁸⁹³ *The Ascent of Mount Carmel*, Bk. III, chaps. 12, 34. Cf. St. Thomas, IIa IIae, q. 180, a.5 ad 2um.

⁸⁹⁴ Ibid., Bk. III, chaps. 1–15. Chapter 15 sums up the preceding chapters.

⁸⁹⁵ St. Thomas, Ia, q.77, a.8; q.78, a.4; q.79, a.6 f.

⁸⁹⁶ St. Thomas (Ia, q.79, a. 7) explains it well, for he says that the faculties are specified by their formal object, and that there is no difference between the formal object of the intellect (specified by intelligible being or the true) and the intellectual memory which retains ideas and judgment.

In the first objection stated in this seventh article, St. Thomas notes that St. Augustine (*De Trinitate*, Bk. X, chaps. 10 f.) “assigns to the soul memory, understanding, and will” and thereby seems to distinguish between them. Then he replies that St. Augustine, as is indicated in *De Trinitate*, Bk. XIV, chap. 7, understood by memory the soul’s habit of retention; by intelligence, the act of the intellect; and by will, the act of the will.

In other words, St. Augustine takes the descriptive point of view of experimental psychology, or of introspection (it is thus that St. John of the Cross speaks), whereas St. Thomas, as a metaphysician, takes the ontological point of view of the real distinction of the faculties according to their formal object. But such a distinction does not exist between the intellect and the intellectual memory.

⁸⁹⁷ Loc. cit.

⁸⁹⁸ Isa. 59: 15.

⁸⁹⁹ Jer. 2:32.

⁹⁰⁰ Ps. 105:13,21.

⁹⁰¹ *The Ascent of Mount Carmel*, Bk. III, chaps. 6 f. Hope, he says, is so much the greater as the memory is empty of notions of created things.

⁹⁰² Ps. 76:3, 12.

⁹⁰³ Ps. 70: 16.

⁹⁰⁴ Ps. 118: 51 f.

⁹⁰⁵ Ecclus. 7:40.

⁹⁰⁶ *The Imitation* seems to have been written by a holy religious who culled from the works of St. Augustine what is most applicable to the interior life. It matters little whether we know the name of its author; this book somewhat resembles Melchisedech, a type of the Messiah, of whom it is said that “he had neither father nor mother” because he belonged, so to speak, to a supratemporal order. Likewise, many sublime hymns of the liturgy bear the name of no author; the same is true of many famous melodies. Among anonymous writings, some are debasing, others sublime. There are two classes of people who hide themselves: the criminal who flees punishment, and

the saint who through humility wishes to remain unknown.

⁹⁰⁷ *The Imitation of Christ*, Bk. III, chap. 31.

⁹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, Bk. I, chap. 23.

⁹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, Bk. III, chap. 39.

⁹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, chap. 43.

⁹¹¹ *Ibid.*, chap. 22.

⁹¹² *Ibid.*, chap. 26.

⁹¹³ *Ibid.*, chap. 31.

⁹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, Bk. I, chap. 23.

⁹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, Bk. III, chap. 39.

⁹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, chap. 43.

⁹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, chap. 22.

⁹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, chap. 26.

⁹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, chap. 31.

⁹²⁰ *Ibid.*

⁹²¹ *The Ascent of Mount Carmel*, Bk. III, chap. 14. On this subject we must recall what St. John of the Cross says in *The Ascent of Mount Carmel*, Bk. III, chap. I passim: “When the reader observes that I teach the annihilation of these powers in the matter of their operations, he will perhaps imagine that I am destroying and not building up the spiritual edifice. This objection would be valid if my purpose here were to instruct only beginners, who are to be led onwards by means of these discursive and tangible apprehensions. But as I am teaching how to advance by contemplation to the divine union, for which end all these means, and the sensible exertion of the powers of the soul must cease and be silent, in order that God in His own way may bring that union to pass—it is necessary to release the faculties and to empty them, and to make them renounce their natural jurisdiction and operations, that the supernatural may fill and enlighten them; seeing that their powers cannot compass so great a matter, but rather, unless suppressed, prove a difficulty in the way....

“You will, perhaps, object and say: All this is very well, but the principle involves the destruction of the natural use and course of our faculties.... Surely God does not destroy nature, but rather perfects it; but its destruction is the natural issue of this doctrine....

“To this I reply: The more the memory is united to God the more it loses all distinct knowledge, and at last all such fades utterly away when the state of perfection is reached. In the beginning, when this is going on, great forgetfulness ensues, for these forms and knowledge fall into oblivion, men neglect themselves in outward things, forgetting to eat or drink;... and all this because the memory is lost in God. But he who has attained to the habit of union does not forget in this way that which relates to moral and natural reason; he performs in much greater perfection all necessary and befitting actions, though by the ministry of forms and knowledge in the memory, supplied in a special manner by God.... The operations of the memory, therefore, and of the other powers in this state are, as it were, divine.... Therefore the operations of the soul in the state of union are the operations of the Holy Ghost, and consequently, divine.” The soul is then clearly under the regime of the seven gifts of the Holy Ghost, and the special inspirations of the Holy Ghost incline it to the superior acts of the infused virtues which the gifts accompany. “The actions and the prayers of such souls,” says St. John of the Cross (*ibid.*), “always attain their end.”

⁹²² Cf. St. Thomas, Ia IIae, q.85, a.3.

⁹²³ Denzinger, no. 1786. It is said here that it is thanks to divine revelation that the natural truths of religion can be known by all, quickly, with a firm certitude, and without any admixture of errors.

⁹²⁴ See Ia, q. 1, a. 1.

⁹²⁵ Cf. IIa IIae, q. 167, a. 1.

⁹²⁶ *Ibid.*, q.35, a.4 ad 3um.

⁹²⁷ St. Thomas, *In Epist. I Cor.* 8: I, where he discusses the words, “Knowledge puffeth up,” writes: “Here the Apostle does not approve of much knowledge, if the mode of knowing is ignored. Moreover, the mode of knowing is that you should know in what order, with what eagerness, to what end each thing must be known: in what order, that you should know first that which is more proper for salvation; with what eagerness, that you should seek with greater ardor that which is more efficacious to inflame love; to what end, that you should not wish to know anything for vainglory and curiosity, but for your own and your neighbor’s edification.”

See also IIa IIae, q. 166, On the Virtue of Studiousness. St. Thomas discusses here the virtue of studiousness which represses both vain curiosity and intellectual sloth in order to lead people to the study of what should be studied, in the manner in which this should be done, when it should be done, and for a moral and supernatural end.

Cf. also, Ila Ilae, q. 188, a.5 ad 3um, On the Studies Which Are Suitable for Religious. They should study sacred science: “It becomes not religious, whose whole life is devoted to the service of God, to seek for other learning, except so far as it is referred to the sacred doctrine.”

⁹²⁸ Cf. I Cor. 3: 19: “The wisdom of this world is foolishness with God.” Cf. St. Thomas, Ila Ilae, q.46, On Folly. The saint shows that it is opposed to the gift of wisdom, that it is a sin, and that it is born especially of lust.

⁹²⁹ Cf. Ila Ilae, q. 138, where St. Thomas speaks of the dangers of obstinacy in a person’s own judgment, when he is no longer willing to listen to authorized counsels given to him.

Pertinacity is found sometimes in certain spiritual people who go astray. They have zeal, but it is a bitter zeal; they are no longer willing to listen to the wise advice given them, and they wish to impose their judgment on everyone as if they alone had the Holy Ghost. They are inflated with spiritual pride, they fail in charity under the pretext of reforming everything about them; they may become the enemies of peace and provoke profound discord. St. John of the Cross, deploring these errors, used to say: “Where there is not enough love, put love there, and you will reap love.”

⁹³⁰ Cf. Ila Ilae, q.15.

⁹³¹ Mark 3:5.

⁹³² Matt. 23: 16, 23 f.

⁹³³ John n:40.

⁹³⁴ Rom. 11:8.

⁹³⁵ Joel 2:12 f.

⁹³⁶ Cf. St. Thomas, Ila Ilae, q. 15, a. 1.

⁹³⁷ Cf. ibid., q.46, a.2 ad 3um: “Folly is opposed to the precepts, which are given by the contemplation of truth.”

⁹³⁸ *The Imitation*, Bk. I, chap. 23.

⁹³⁹ Cf. St. Thomas, Ila Ilae, q. 15, a.3.

⁹⁴⁰ *In Ps. 47*.

⁹⁴¹ Jacques Maritain in his book, *Le Docteur Angelique* (1929, p. 111), says: “How can we reconcile two apparently contradictory facts: the fact that modern history seems to enter on a new Middle Age, in which the unity and universality of Christian culture will be found again and extended this time to the entire universe, and the fact that the general trend of modern civilization seems to draw it toward the universalism of Antichrist and his rod of iron rather than toward the universalism of Christ and His liberating law, and in any event to forbid the hope of the unification of the world in one universal Christian ‘empire’?”

“My answer is as follows: I think that two immanent movements cross at every point in the world’s history and affect each of its momentary complexes. One of these movements draws on high everything in the world which shares in the divine life of the Church, which is in the world but not of the world, and follows the attraction of Christ, the head of the human race.

“The other movement draws downward everything in the world which belongs to the prince of this world, the head of all the wicked. While undergoing these two internal movements, history advances in time. Thus human affairs are subjected to an ever stronger distention until the material finally snaps. Thus the cockle grows with the wheat; the capital of sin grows throughout the course of history and the capital of grace also increases and superabounds.... Christian heroism will one day become the only solution for the problems of life. Then as God proportions His graces to needs, and never tempts anyone beyond his strength, a flowering of sanctity will without doubt be seen to coincide with the worst state of human history.” The Gospel of St. Matthew (24: 24) declares: “There shall arise false Christs and false prophets, and shall show great signs and wonders, insomuch as to deceive (if possible) even the elect”; and in the Apocalypse (chap. 12) we are told that the elect will be preserved during the great tribulation. Cf. E. B. Allo, O.P., *L’Apocalypse de saint Jean* (Paris, 1921), pp. 145 ff. The greatest effort of evil seems to have to coincide with the last triumph of Christ, as happened during His life on earth.

⁹⁴² See Ila Ilae, q.7. a.2.

⁹⁴³ Ibid., ad 1um.

⁹⁴⁴ In Ila Ilae, q.45, a.2, no. 3.

⁹⁴⁵ *The Ascent of Mount Carmel*, Bk II, chap.11; Faith is a dark night for the soul.

⁹⁴⁶ Ibid., Bk. II, chap. 3: The soul must remain in the obscurity of faith which will guide it to the highest contemplation. Ibid., Bk. II, chap. 9: “Faith is the sole proximate and proportionate means of the soul’s union with God.”

⁹⁴⁷ *The Ascent of Mount Carmel*, Bk. II, chap. 22; chaps. 10, 11, 16.

⁹⁴⁸ Heb. 11: 1: “Faith is the substance of things to be hoped for, the evidence of things that appear not.” “Faith gives us the substance, or rather is itself that of which the reality does not yet appear,” says St. John Chrysostom.

⁹⁴⁹ See *Ila Ilae*, q. 4, a. 1; *De veritate*, q. 14, a. 2: “Faith is in us a certain beginning of eternal life.”

⁹⁵⁰ Cf. St. Thomas, *In Boetium de Trinitate*, q.3, a. 1 ad 4.

⁹⁵¹ We read in Bk. I, chap. 5 of *The Imitation*: “All holy Scripture should be read in the spirit in which it was written.... Inquire not who may have said a thing, but consider what is said. Men pass away, but the truth of the Lord abideth forever. God speaketh to us in divers ways, without respect of persons. Our curiosity is often a hindrance to us in reading the Scriptures, when we wish to understand and to discuss where we ought to pass on in simplicity. If thou wilt derive profit, read with humility, with simplicity, and with faith; and never wish to have the name of learning. Be fond of inquiring and listen in silence to the words of the saints; and let not the parables of the ancients be displeasing to thee, for they are not uttered without a cause.”

⁹⁵² Cf. *Ila Ilae*, q. 167, a. 1. See also *ibid.*, q. 166, on the moral virtue of studiousness or application to study in order to correct the contrary and at times successive deviations of curiosity and intellectual sloth. Once curiosity is satisfied, it often gives place to intellectual sloth in a person who has not the virtue of studiousness, which orders study not only to our personal satisfaction, but to God and to the good of souls.

⁹⁵³ St. Thomas, *In Epist. I Cor. 8*: I, explains the words of St. Paul, “Knowledge puffeth up; but charity edifieth,” by saying: “Knowledge, if alone and without charity, puffs one up with pride. Add charity to knowledge, then knowledge will be useful” Then he recalls what St. Bernard says: “There are those who wish to know for the purpose of knowing a great deal, and this is curiosity; some that they may know, and this is vanity; some that they may sell their knowledge, and this is base gain; some that they may be edified, and this is prudence; some that they may edify, and this is charity.”

⁹⁵⁴ Cf. *Ila Ilae*, q.53, a.3.

⁹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, q.138.

⁹⁵⁶ Much could be said about the first intellectual gaze and its profound view, whether in the natural order or in the order of supernatural faith. The first gaze may lead into error if its object is something accidental and not the proper object of the intellectual faculty; it is quite otherwise if the object corresponds to the nature of the intellect. There are two simple beings: the child who does not yet know evil; and the sanctified old man who has forgotten it by dint of conquering it. Therefore the old man loves the child and is loved by it.

The intelligible being of sensible things and truth in general are the object of the first natural gaze of the human intellect; without this gaze, all knowledge and all philosophy would be impossible. Metaphysics is the profound view of intelligible being which permits man to rise in an absolutely certain manner to God, first Being, supreme Cause, and last End. Likewise all ethics proceed from this first gaze: “We must do good and avoid evil.”

The first gaze in the order of supernatural faith is that which we see in the patriarchs of the Old Testament; they believe that God is and that He is the supreme rewarder (*Heb. 11:6*), and in this case God is considered not only as the Author of nature, but as the Author of salvation.

Likewise the first supernatural gaze, at the time of the coming of our Savior, after the Sermon on the Mount, is expressed in these words of St. Matthew (7:28f.): “When Jesus had fully ended these words, the people were in admiration at His doctrine. For He was teaching them as one having power, and not as the scribes and Pharisees,” who recapitulated the texts. The first gaze is again that of a child at Christmas before the Savior’s crib. The profound view is that of a contemplative at the end of his life, that of a St. John, a St. Augustine, a St. Thomas, a St. John of the Cross.

In the case of a religious also, the first simple and penetrating gaze is that which he has when he hears the call of God in his youth; this simple gaze is often more elevated than many of the complications that will come later. Blessed are they who find it again later on in a profound view, the view of wisdom on all of life.

⁹⁵⁷ Cf. St. Thomas, *Ia*, q.80, a.1 f.

⁹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, q.95, a. 2.

⁹⁵⁹ Cf. *Ia Ilae*, q.109, a.3 f. The will, which is directly turned away from the supernatural last end, is indirectly turned away from the natural last end, for every sin against the supernatural law is indirectly opposed to the natural law, which obliges us to obey God, whatever He may command.

⁹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, q. 85, a. 3: “In so far as the will is deprived of its order to the good, there is the wound of malice.”

⁹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, q. 17, a.7: “Reason governs the irascible and concupiscible not by a despotic supremacy, which is that of a master over his slave; but by a politic and royal supremacy, whereby the free are governed, who are not wholly subject to command.”

⁹⁶² *Ibid.*, q.77, a.4: “Inordinate love of self is the cause of every sin.”

⁹⁶³ *Ibid.*, a.5.

⁹⁶⁴ These are like diseases of the will, but not diseases properly so called, as certain materialist doctors believe when they talk about *abulia*. The will is a faculty of the spiritual or immaterial order; it is not the seat of diseases like those which effect our organism, for example, the nervous centers. But certain diseases of these centers render the exercise of the will much more difficult, just as others suppress the condition required by the imagination for the exercise of reason and bring in their wake mental confusion or “fixed ideas” and madness.

⁹⁶⁵ Cf. Denzinger, no. 1226: “The soul ought not to think of a reward, of paradise, or of hell, or of death, or of eternity, etc....” Cf. *ibid.*, nos. 1232, 1337 ff.

⁹⁶⁶ This teaching constituted a poor understanding of the act of Christian hope; by it we do not subordinate God to ourselves, but we desire God for ourselves by subordinating ourselves to Him, for He is the ultimate End of the act of hope. As Cajetan clearly points out (*In Ila Ilae*, q. 17, a.5, no. 6): “I desire God for myself (finaliter), for God’s sake, and not for my own sake; whereas when it is a question of things inferior to me, such as a fruit, I desire them for my own and for myself, I subordinate them to myself as to an end. On the contrary, by the act of hope I already subordinate myself to God (the last End of this act). This subordination becomes

more perfect through charity, which makes me efficaciously love God formally for Himself and more than myself, by making me will His glory and the extension of His kingdom.”

⁹⁶⁷ St. Thomas (IIa IIae, q.19, a.6) clearly distinguishes between self-love which is blamable and that which is not. “Self-love,” he says, “may stand in a threefold relationship to charity. In one way, it is contrary to charity, when a man places his end in the love of his own good (preferred to God). In another way, it is included in charity, when a man loves himself for the sake of God and in God (in order to glorify God here on earth and in eternity). In a third way, it is indeed distinct from charity, but is not contrary thereto, as when a man loves himself from the point of view of his own good, yet not so as to place his end in this his own good”: for example, if we love ourselves naturally without thereby turning away from God or disobeying His law.

It must be remembered that, according to St. Thomas (Ia, q.60, a.5), every creature is naturally inclined to love more than himself the Author of his nature (i.e., God), who keeps it in existence, just as in our organism the hand spontaneously exposes itself for the sake of the whole. But this natural inclination to love God more than self is attenuated in man by original sin and by his personal sins.

⁹⁶⁸ *De civitate Dei*, Bk. XIV, chap. 28. Pages like those we have quoted make one think that in St. Augustine infused contemplation often directed from on high the reasoning necessary for the written or spoken exposition of divine truth.

⁹⁶⁹ St. Thomas, IIa IIae, q. 17, a.6 ad 3um. Cf. *ibid.*, q.83, a.9: “Now our end is God toward whom our affections tend in two ways: first, by our willing the glory of God, secondly, by our willing to enjoy His glory. The first belongs to the love whereby we love God in Himself; the second belongs to the love whereby we love ourselves in God. Wherefore the first petition is expressed thus: Hallowed be Thy name; and the second thus: Thy kingdom come, by which we ask to come to the glory of His kingdom.” And by an act of hope we can desire eternal life as our supreme good; and by an act of charity, desire it in order to glorify God eternally. Cf. Cajetan, In IIam IIae, q.23,a.1,n0.2.

⁹⁷⁰ *The Imitation*, Bk. III, chap. 27.

⁹⁷¹ St. Thomas speaks in like manner (Ia IIae, q.109, a. 2): “In the state of corrupt nature, man falls short of what he could do by his nature, so that he is unable to accomplish this good fully by his own natural powers.... But a man can do some particular good, such as building a house, planting a vineyard, and the like.” *Ibid.*, a. 3: “In the state of corrupt nature man falls short of this in the appetite of his rational will, which, unless it is cured by God’s grace, follows its private good, on account of the corruption of nature.”

Cf. IIIa, q.69, a.3: Even after baptism there remain concupiscence and the other wounds that are in the process of healing, thereby furnishing an occasion of struggle and of merit.

⁹⁷² *The Imitation*, Bk. III, chap. 54.

⁹⁷³ The Dialogue, chap. 51. St. Thomas (Ia IIae, q.58, a. 5) had likewise noted, following Aristotle, that every man judges of the end that is fitting for him according to the subjective dispositions of his will and sensible appetites: “Such as a man is, such does the end seem to him.” The proud man indeed finds what satisfies his pride, the humble man what preserves him in humility.

⁹⁷⁴ The Dialogue, chap. 122.

⁹⁷⁵ See especially the Theological Introduction by Father Hugueny, O.P., in the French translation, I, 71–82.

⁹⁷⁶ St. Thomas discusses at length each of these virtues and the opposing vices in IIa IIae. A profound study on the training of the will might be drawn from this part of the Summa, since all these virtues, whether acquired or infused, have their seat in that faculty.

⁹⁷⁷ Matt. 16: 24.

⁹⁷⁸ John 12: 24 f.

⁹⁷⁹ Ps. 107:2.

⁹⁸⁰ Acts 9:6.

⁹⁸¹ Matt. 11:30.

⁹⁸² Matt. 7:7.

⁹⁸³ Cf. Summa, IIa IIae, q.83, a.2, 16.

⁹⁸⁴ Phil. 4:13.

⁹⁸⁵ Bk. III, chaps. 15 ff.

⁹⁸⁶ Ps.61:11.

⁹⁸⁷ See I Cor. 7:29–31.

⁹⁸⁸ The Ascent Of Mount Carmel, Bk. III, chaps. 30, 32.

- [989](#) Matt. 6: 33.
- [990](#) Cf. I Cor. 13:1.
- [991](#) Luke 10: 20.
- [992](#) *The Ascent of Mount Carmel*, Bk. III, chap. 44.
- [993](#) St. Thomas, *In Epist. ad Hebr.*, 10:25: “The natural movement increases in proportion as it draws near its end. The contrary is true of violent movement (e.g., of a stone cast into the air). Grace likewise moves one according to the natural mode. Therefore those who are in the state of grace ought to grow so much the more as they draw nearer the end.” Cf. Ia IIae, q.35, a.6: “Every natural movement is more intense in the end.”
- [994](#) The Imitation of Christ, Bk. II, chap. 12.
- [995](#) See Ia IIae, q.73, a.5.
- [996](#) Ecclus. 10: 15.
- [997](#) Cf. IIae, q.84. a.2; q.89, a.3 ad 2um; q. 163, a. I.
- [998](#) Gen. 3:5 f.
- [999](#) Cf. IIa IIae, q. 162, a.8 ad 1um.

Section 3

- ¹⁰⁰⁰ Ibid., a.1.
- ¹⁰⁰¹ *De civitate Dei*, Bk. XIV, chap. 13: “Superbia est perversae celsitudinis appetitus.”
- ¹⁰⁰² Ibid., Bk. XIX, chap. 12.
- ¹⁰⁰³ Luke 10:21.
- ¹⁰⁰⁴ Cf. I Cor. 8: I.
- ¹⁰⁰⁵ *Morales*, Bk. XXIII, chap. 5.
- ¹⁰⁰⁶ *De gradibus humilitatis*, chap. 10.
- ¹⁰⁰⁷ Cf. I Cor. 4:8.
- ¹⁰⁰⁸ In her *Dialogue*, St. Catherine of Siena says that pride obscures the knowledge of the truth, nourishes self-love, and is the enemy of obedience, and that its pith is impatience. In chapter 128 she writes: “O cursed pride, based on self-love, how hast thou blinded the eye of their intellect, that while they seem to love themselves and be tender to themselves, they are in truth cruel.... They are really in the greatest poverty and misery, for they are deprived of the riches of virtue and have fallen from the heights of grace into the depths of mortal sin. They seem to see, but are blind for they know neither themselves nor Me.” Pride is truly like a bandage over the eyes of the spirit. It is at least like a darkened glass, which lets things be seen only through its color. Consequently it perverts judgment.
- ¹⁰⁰⁹ *The Dark Night of the Soul*, Bk. I, chap. 2.
- ¹⁰¹⁰ Summa, IIa IIae, q. 13°, a. I.
- ¹⁰¹¹ Ibid., q.131, a. I.
- ¹⁰¹² Cf. Bossuet, *Sermon sur l’ambition*.
- ¹⁰¹³ See IIa IIae, q. 132, a. 1–3.
- ¹⁰¹⁴ Ibid., a.5.
- ¹⁰¹⁵ Jas. 4:6.
- ¹⁰¹⁶ Matt. 6:2.
- ¹⁰¹⁷ John 15: 5.
- ¹⁰¹⁸ See I Cor. 4:7.
- ¹⁰¹⁹ Cf. II Cor.3:5.
- ¹⁰²⁰ Cf. Ia, q.20, a. 3. This is the principle of predilection, which contains virtually the whole tract on predestination and that on grace.
- ¹⁰²¹ Phil. 2: 13.
- ¹⁰²² *The Imitation*, Bk. I, chaps. 2, 7; Bk. II, chap. 2.
- ¹⁰²³ Ps. 118:71.
- ¹⁰²⁴ *The Imitation*, Bk. I, chap. 12.
- ¹⁰²⁵ Ecclus. 34:9.
- ¹⁰²⁶ Cf. St. Thomas, IIa IIae, q.35; De malo, q. 11; St. John of the Cross, *The Dark Night*, Bk. I, chap. 7.
- ¹⁰²⁷ Cf. ibid., q. 133, a.2.
- ¹⁰²⁸ From *acedior*, to suffer impatiently, to grieve over one’s sin, because one fails to make an effort for what is good.

[1029](#) *The Dark Night*, Bk. I, chap. 9.

[1030](#) Cf. IIa IIae, q.82, a. I.

[1031](#) Denzinger, nos. 1248 f.

[1032](#) Rom. 12:1, 10 f.

[1033](#) Bk. I, chap. 7.

[1034](#) Cf. IIa IIae, q.35, a.3. St. Thomas even says (*De malo*, q.II, a.3 ad 6um): “That man should delight in God, falls under the precept, just as that man should love God, because delight follows love.”

[1035](#) Morales, Bk. XXXI, chap. 17.

[1036](#) Cf.. IIa IIae, q. 35, a.4.

[1037](#) Ethics, Bk. VIII, chap. 5.

[1038](#) Cf. IIa IIae. q.35. a.4 ad 3um.

[1039](#) *The Ascent of Mount Carmel*, Bk. III, chap. 21.

[1040](#) *De instit. monasteriorum*, Bk. X, cap. ult.

[1041](#) Cf. IIa IIae, q. 35, a. 1 ad 4um.

[1042](#) Phil. 4:4–7.

[1043](#) An imperfection is distinguished from these sins of frailty because it is only an act of lesser generosity in the service of God and of slighter esteem for the evangelical counsels. This is the case with a man who has five talents and sometimes acts as if he had only two; his act is still meritorious, but weak (remissus), and he is more or less clearly conscious of this inferiority. What is less good in itself must not be confused with what is essentially evil; what is less good for us here and now must not be confused with what would even now be evil for us. The lesser good is not an evil, as the lesser evil is not a good. Evidently we must avoid confusing good and evil. Consult our opinion on this point in *L’amour de Dieu et la Croix de Jesus*, I, 360–89.

But if it is theoretically easy to draw a distinction, practically and concretely it is hard to say where lesser generosity ends and where negligence and sloth begin. Moreover, a soul that wishes truly to tend to perfection must remember that not only should it not fall back, but that it should not retard its ascent; indeed, its pace should be accelerated. As a stone falls more rapidly as it approaches the earth which attracts it, so souls ought to make more rapid progress toward God as they approach nearer to Him and He draws them more (Cf. St. Thomas, *In Ep. ad Hebr.*, 10:25).

In addition, imperfection disposes to venial sin, from the fact that one does not struggle as energetically as one should against the inclinations of egoism.

[1044](#) Ps. 54:13 f.

[1045](#) John 20:23.

[1046](#) *Introduction to a Devout Life*, Bk. II, chap. 19.

[1047](#) Cf. IIIa, q.89, a.2: “Now the intensity of the penitent’s movement may be proportionate sometimes to a greater grace than that from which man fell by sinning, sometimes to an equal grace, sometimes to a lesser. Wherefore the penitent sometimes arises to a greater grace than that which he had before, sometimes to an equal, sometimes to a lesser grace: and the same applies to the virtues, which flow from grace.”

[1048](#) Ps.18:13.

[1049](#) *Pratique de la confession ordinaire*, § 4.

[1050](#) Ibid.,§9.

[1051](#) *Divers avis touchant la confession*, demande XXX.

[1052](#) *De poenitentia*, chap. 13. quoted by St. Thomas, IIIa, q.84, a.9 ad 2um: “Whether penance can be continuous?”

[1053](#) Gal. 5: 22 f.

[1054](#) Sess. XXII, chaps. 1 f.

[1055](#) Likewise the humanity of Christ remains numerically the same, but since His resurrection it is impassible, whereas before that it was subject to sorrow and death.

- [1056](#) “The exterior sacrifice is in the nature of a sign, as a sign of the interior sacrifice.”
- [1057](#) Heb. 7:25.
- [1058](#) *Homil. LX* to the people of Antioch.
- [1059](#) *Livre de ses visions et instructions*, chap 67.
- [1060](#) Cf. St Thomas, IIIa, q.48, a.2: “He properly atones for an offense who offers something which the offended one loves equally or even more than the detested the offense.”
- [1061](#) Cf. Council of Trent, Sess. XXII, chap. 11: “Huius quippe oblatione placatus Dominus, g *ratiam et donum poenitentiae* concedens, *crimina et peccata etiam ingentia dimittit.*”
- [1062](#) Ibid.
- [1063](#) Cf. St Thomas, IIIa, q.79, a. 5, a.7 ad 2um, where he says that there is no other limit indicated than that of the measure of our devotion: “secundum quantitatem seu modum devotionis eorum” (i.e., fidelium) Cajetan, *In Illam*, q. 79, a.5. John of St Thomas, *In Illam*, dis. 32, a.3. Gonet, *Clypeus... De Eucharistia*, disp. 11,a.5 no. 100. Salmanicensis, *De Eucharistia*, disp XIII, dub. 6. We completely disagree with what has been written on this subject by Father de la Taille, *Esquisse du mystere de la foi* (Paris, 1924), p.22.
- [1064](#) Cf IIa IIae, q.83, a.13.
- [1065](#) The first part of the Mass up to the Offertory inspires us with sentiments of penance and contrition (*Confiteor; Kyrie eleison*), of adoration and gratitude (*Gloria in excelsis*), of petition (collect), of living faith (Epistle, Gospel, Credo), in order to prepare us for the offering of the holy Victim, which is followed by Communion and thanksgiving.
- [1066](#) *The Imitation*, Bk. IV, chap. 8.
- [1067](#) Ibid., chap. 9.
- [1068](#) John 17:22 f.
- [1069](#) John 6:35, 51 f., 56 f.
- [1070](#) Confessions, Bk. VII, chap. 10.
- [1071](#) Cf. IIIa, q. 79, a. I.
- [1072](#) Ibid.
- [1073](#) Matt. 6: 11.
- [1074](#) Bk. IV, chap. 2.
- [1075](#) Ibid., chap. 3.
- [1076](#) *The Dialogue*, chap. 110
- [1077](#) Matt. 13:12.
- [1078](#) Cf. *In Epistolam ad Hebraeos*, 10:15: “The natural motion (e.g., of a falling stone) grows the more (in proportion) as it more nearly approaches its end. The contrary is true of violent motion (e.g., of a stone cast into the air). Grace likewise follows the motion of nature. Therefore those who are in the state of grace ought to grow more in proportion as they draw nearer to their end.”
- [1079](#) Bk. IV, chap. 4.
- [1080](#) We are not speaking here of truly pious people who, by reason of some necessity, must leave the church shortly after Communion in order to fulfill a real duty.
- [1081](#) On this point consult the beautiful life of the foundress of the Cenacle, Mother Marie Therese Couderc: *Une grande humble*, by Father Perroy, S.J., p. 195: “When I have received Holy Communion,” she said to her superior, “it is impossible for me to leave the chapel. The time devoted to thanksgiving by the community seems so short that I must do myself violence to follow the sisters to the refectory.”
- [1082](#) Luke 10:27.
- [1083](#) We may recall what characterized the thanksgiving of the pilgrim saint, Benedict Joseph Labre, who was often ravished and transfigured by the contemplation of Christ present in the Eucharist.

[1084](#) Merit *de condigno* is based on justice; merit *de congruo*, on the rights of friendship.

[1085](#) Dan. 3:28 f., 34.

[1086](#) Ps. 69:6.

[1087](#) Ps. 78:9.

[1088](#) Ps. 118: 114, 116.

[1089](#) Matt. 7:7.

[1090](#) Cf. St. Thomas, IIa IIae, q.83, a.15 ad um: “Four conditions are laid down: namely, to ask (1) for ourselves (2) things necessary for salvation (3) piously, (4) perseveringly; when all these four concur, we always obtain what we ask for.” And likewise of the sinner’s prayer, he says (ibid., a.16): “God hears the sinner’s prayer if it proceeds from a good natural desire, not out of justice, because the sinner does not merit to be heard, but out of pure mercy, provided, however, he fulfills the four conditions given above, namely, that he beseech for himself things necessary for salvation, piously and perseveringly.”

[1091](#) Mal. 3:6.

[1092](#) This divine immutability is often affirmed, and in a beautiful manner, in Holy Scripture: “God is not a man... that He should be changed” (Num. 13:19). “The heavens are the works of Thy hands. They shall perish, but Thou remainest: and all of them shall grow old like a garment, and as a vesture Thou shalt change them, and they shall be changed. But Thou art always the selfsame, and Thy years shall not fail” (Ps. 101:26–28). “Every best gift, and every perfect gift, is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no change, nor shadow of alteration” (Jas. I: 17).

[1093](#) Matt. 7:7; Luke 11:9; Mark 11:24.

[1094](#) Cf. St. Thomas, IIa IIae, q.83, a.2: “Divine providence disposes not only what effects shall take place, but also from what causes and in what order these effects shall proceed. Now, among other causes, human acts are the causes of certain effects. Wherefore it must be that men do certain actions, not that thereby they may change the divine disposition, but that by those actions they may achieve certain effects according to the order of the divine disposition: and the same is to be said of natural causes. And so is it with regard to prayer. For we pray, not that we may change the divine disposition, but that we may impetrate that which God has disposed to be fulfilled by our prayers.”

[1095](#) John 4:10, 13 f.

[1096](#) *Dialogues*, Bk. I, chap. 8. This passage is quoted by St. Thomas in IIa IIae, q.83. a.2.

[1097](#) To every adult, though he may be a great sinner, is offered the efficacious grace to pray. How? Every man receives from time to time the actual grace which renders prayer really possible for him. In this sufficient grace is offered efficacious help, as fruit in the flower. But if man resists this grace, called sufficient grace, he merits to be deprived of efficacious grace, which would make him pray effectively. We are face to face here with the mystery of grace, which can be expressed in the following terms: if resistance to grace, which is an evil, comes solely from our defectibility, non-resistance, which is a good, comes first of all from God, the primary source of all good. And as the love of God for us is the cause of all good, no one would be better than another if he were not more loved by God. “What hast thou that thou hast not received?” (I Cor. 4:7.) Cf. St. Thomas, Ia, q.20, a. 3 f.

Christ said (John 15:5): “Without Me you can do nothing” in the order of salvation. This is an additional reason to beg Him to grant us grace as He recommends us to do. If, therefore, after sincerely praying with humility, confidence, and perseverance, we did not obtain the helps necessary to salvation, there would be contradiction in the very heart of God and in His promises. These immutable promises are the basis of the infallible efficacy of prayer well made.

[1098](#) Luke 11:9–13.

[1099](#) John 16: 23 f.

[1100](#) The grace of final perseverance is, in fact, the state of grace continuing unto death; but the state of grace, being the principle of merit, cannot be merited. Cf. St. Thomas, Ia IIae, q. 114, a.9: “Whether a man may merit perseverance.”

[1101](#) Wisd. 7:7.

[1102](#) Matt. 15:28.

[1103](#) Cf. II Cor. 12:9.

[1104](#) Matt. 6:33.

[1105](#) Ps. 144: 18.

[1106](#) Ps 41:2.

[1107](#) Cf. Dom Grea, *La sainte liturgie*, chapters on the Divine Office, the chant of the Church, the spouse of Christ.

- [1108](#) Ps. 33:9.
- [1109](#) Ps. 118:32.
- [1110](#) Matt. 6: 33.
- [1111](#) Ibid., 5 f.
- [1112](#) Life, chap. 8.
- [1113](#) Ps. 41:2 f.
- [1114](#) Jas. 4:6.
- [1115](#) Cf. IIa IIae, q.180, a.1: “Now the appetitive power moves one to observe things either with the senses or with the intellect, sometimes for love of the thing seen because, as it is written (Matt. 6: 21), ‘where thy treasure is, there is thy heart also’; sometimes for love of the very knowledge that one acquires by observation. Wherefore Gregory (Hom. XIV in Ezech.) makes the contemplative life to consist in the charity of God, since through loving God we are aflame to gaze on His beauty. And since everyone delights when he obtains what he loves, it follows that the contemplative life terminates in delight, which is seated in the affective power, the result being that love also becomes more intense.”
- [1116](#) Chap. I.
- [1117](#) Chap. 85.
- [1118](#) Cf. Ia, q.82, a.3: The love of God is better than the knowledge of God. IIa IIae, q.27, a.4: “Whether God can be loved immediately in this life.” “Charity loves God immediately, and other things through God.... With regard to knowledge, it is the reverse.”
- [1119](#) The reason for this is that the good, the object of love, is in things, in reality exterior to ourselves, in this case in God Himself. On the contrary, the true formally considered, that is, the conformity of our judgment with the real, is in ourselves. Cf. St. Thomas, *ibid.*
- [1120](#) Ibid., q.184, a.1; Ia IIae, q.66, a.6.
- [1121](#) Prayer, under the name of discursive meditation, has at times been transformed into an exercise which seems to be an act of prudence, foreseeing what must be done, rather than the union of the acts of the three theological virtues, which find their nourishment in God alone. Doubtless it is fitting in prayer to give a place to the resolution inspired by faith, which directs prudence from above, but prayer should not be transformed into an examination of conscience or an exercise in foresight. We must maintain here in a practical manner the superiority of the theological virtues, among which charity excels especially under the form of the love of God, which is superior to love of neighbor, although the second may be the great indication of the first.
- [1122](#) Heb. 11: 1.
- [1123](#) The formal motive of hope is the all-powerful and helpful divine goodness: Deus auxilians. Cf. IIa IIae, q. 17, a.4.
- [1124](#) Ps.41:2.
- [1125](#) Cf. Ia IIae, q.62, a.4.
- [1126](#) *The Way of Perfection*, chaps. 27–38.
- [1127](#) Jas. 4:6; I Pet. 5:5; Prov. 3:34.
- [1128](#) Matt. 18:3.
- [1129](#) St. Thomas, Ia IIae. q.89. a.4.
- [1130](#) John 4: 10.
- [1131](#) John 7:37–39.
- [1132](#) John 14:26.
- [1133](#) Cf. I John 2:20, 27.
- [1134](#) Rom. 5:5.
- [1135](#) Cf. IIa IIae, q. 180, a.6.
- [1136](#) Luke 16: 10.

[1137](#) Matt. 25:23.

[1138](#) Luke 10:27.

[1139](#) Cf. IIa IIae, q.75, a.2.

[1140](#) Job 12:4.

[1141](#) Ps. 2:4.

[1142](#) Epist. ad Richard

[1143](#) *The Spiritual Doctrine*, Appendix, chap. 8.

[1144](#) Ibid.

[1145](#) Luke 10:27.

[1146](#) *The Institutions*, chap. 3.

[1147](#) Ibid.

[1148](#) Ibid.

[1149](#) Cf. St. Thomas, In Epist. ad Hebr., 10:25: “A natural movement (e.g., of a falling stone) increases in proportion as it draws near its goal. The opposite is true of a violent movement (e.g., of a stone hurled into the air). Grace, moreover, inclines by a sort of analogy with what nature does; therefore those who are in the state of grace ought to grow so much the more as they more nearly approach the end.” The word “more” is used and not “equally.”

[1150](#) Recently Jacques Maritain, in *Les Degres du savoir* (1932, pp. 647 ff.), dealt exceedingly well with the “practicality” of the vocabulary of St. John of the Cross. According to Maritain, the speculative sciences analyze the real into its ontological (or empiriological) elements; in the practical sciences it is a question of composing the means, the dynamic moments by which action should come into existence. Thus concepts bearing the same name will relate to the real in different fashion. Moreover, he rightly says: “As far as mystical language is concerned, it is necessarily different from that of philosophy: in the former, hyperbole is not an ornament of rhetoric, but a means of expression rigorously required to signify things with exactitude, for, in fact, it is an attempt to render intelligible experience itself-and what experience, the most ineffable of all! Philosophical language seeks especially to tell of reality without touching it; mystical language to make it known as if by touching it though not seeing it.... The intellect passes from one conceptual vocabulary to another, just as it passes from Latin to Chinese or Arabic. But it cannot apply the syntax of one to the other.”

Thus St. John of the Cross describes contemplation as a non-activity, whereas St. Thomas defines it as the highest possible activity.... The latter looks at the matter from the ontological point of view; the former from the point of view of mystical experience, in which the suspension of all activity of a human mode must seem to the soul like a non-activity.

[1151](#) *The Imitation of Christ*, Bk. III, chap. 54.

[1152](#) Cf. Ia, q.60, a.5; IIa IIae, q.26, a.3.

[1153](#) Cf. St. Thomas, Ia IIae, q.85, a. 3; q. 109, a.2f.; IIIa, q.69, a.3.

[1154](#) Cf. Ia IIae, q.77, a.4f.

[1155](#) Ibid., q.84

[1156](#) St Thomas, Ia, q.2, Prologue: Ia, q.1,a.10 ad 3um.

[1157](#) Cf. Ia, q.13, a.11.

[1158](#) Cft. IIa, q.1, a.9 ad 3um.

[1159](#) ‘Omnes creaturae stint unum purum nihil, non dico quod sint quid modicum, vel aliquid, sed quod sint unum purum nihil’ (Denzinger, no. p6).

[1160](#) Sometimes even in order to say that the Deity is above being, above unity, the true, and the good, mystics have said: God is non-being, or superbeing. The reader will recognize here Dionysius’ manner of speaking.

[1161](#) Cf. I Cor. 1:21, 25.

[1162](#) In Isaïam, 5, in fine.

[1163](#) See Ia IIae, q. 102, a.2 ad 2um.

- [1164](#) Matt. 5: 29 f.
- [1165](#) Phil. 3:8.
- [1166](#) Cf. *Livre des visions et des instructions de la Bse Angele de Foligno*, chap. 26.
- [1167](#) Cf. Cajetan on Ia, q.39, a. I, no. 7: “The Deity is superior to all in its being and in all its attributes; it is, therefore, above being and above unity, etc.” All this part of the commentary should be read and meditated upon.
- [1168](#) *The Ascent of Mount Carmel*, Bk. I, chap. 4.
- [1169](#) Ibid., Bk. III, chap. 19.
- [1170](#) Cf. II Cor. 6: 10.
- [1171](#) Cf. Ia, q.82, a.3: “The action of the intellect consists in this—that the idea of the thing understood is in the one who understands; while the act of the will consists in this—that the will is inclined to the thing itself as existing in itself. And therefore the Philosopher says (Metaph., VI) that good and evil, which are objects of the will, are in things, but truth and error, which are objects of the intellect, are in the mind.”
- [1172](#) Ibid.
- [1173](#) See IIa IIae, q.19, a.6: “Whether servile fear remains with charity?”
- [1174](#) *The Imitation of Christ*, Bk. III, chap. 5.
- [1175](#) *Perihermeneias*, Bk. I, chap. I.
- [1176](#) *Contra gentes*, Bk. I, chap. 5.
- [1177](#) In scholastic language one would say: “The terminology of spiritual writers is thus simply higher than scholastic terminology, but *secundum quid* is less perfect; just as the knowledge of a more worthy object is simply higher, although it may be at times *secundum quid* less perfect with respect to the mode of knowing (thus faith with respect to metaphysics); in reality knowledge is specified by its object and not by the mode of knowing, so its dignity simply springs from the dignity of the object.” Cf. St. Thomas, IIa IIae, q.4, a.8 (Infused faith, although obscure, is simply more certain than all natural knowledge, even the most evident). The formal object of infused contemplation is superior to that of theological speculation; there is a difference not only of the mode of knowledge, but of the specifying formal object: the divine presence that is experienced.
- [1178](#) John 4: 10, 14.
- [1179](#) Ibid., 7:37 f.
- [1180](#) Cf. IIa IIae, q.45, a.1f.
- [1181](#) Mark 9:31 f.
- [1182](#) Matt. 18:2f.
- [1183](#) Luke 22:24, 26.
- [1184](#) Ibid., 31 f.
- [1185](#) Eph. 4: 2 1–24.
- [1186](#) Col. 3:9 f., 14.
- [1187](#) Joel 2: 12–13.
- [1188](#) In the prologue of his Rule, St. Benedict wrote: “Let us therefore at length arise, since the Scriptures stir us up, saying: ‘It is now the hour for us to rise from sleep’ (Rom. 13:11). And our eyes being now open to the divine light, let us hear with wonderment the divine voice admonishing us, in that it cries out daily and says: ‘Today if you shall hear His voice, harden not your hearts.’ “That is to say: It is time to rise from the sleep of negligence and to walk courageously in the way of God.
- [1189](#) We shall see farther on that, as St. Catherine of Siena says in her *Dialogue* (chaps. 60, 63), the second conversion of the apostles took place more properly at the end of the Passion when Peter wept over his denial, and that Pentecost was like a third conversion or more properly a transformation of the soul, which marks the entrance into the unitive way.
- [1190](#) For example, the second conversion of Blessed Henry Suso, of St. Catherine of Genoa, of Blessed Anthony Neyrot, O.P., and of many others, is well known.
- [1191](#) Father Lallemand is speaking to religious of the Society of Jesus, whose formation he was completing.

¹¹⁹² Nevertheless there will be another difficult period to pass through in order to enter the unitive way of the perfect.

¹¹⁹³ *La Doctrine Spirituelle* (ed. Paris, 1908), 2nd principle, chap. 6, a.2. p.113.

¹¹⁹⁴ Ibid., p. 66.

¹¹⁹⁵ This mode of acting conforms perfectly to what St. Thomas says of the difference between acquired prudence (a true virtue, already described by Aristotle) and infused prudence. and the gift of counsel (IIa IIae, q.47, a.14 and q. 52). Should a man tend to perfection under the almost exclusive direction of acquired prudence (which is, nevertheless, not that of the flesh), he would never reach true Christian perfection, which belongs to the supernatural order; such perfection requires the frequent exercise of infused prudence and of the gift of counsel. These three sources of actions (habitus) are among themselves a little like what agility of the fingers, the acquired art which is in the practical intellect, and musical inspiration are in the musician. Without art, properly so called, and this inspiration, a man will certainly never produce a masterpiece, and will never be able even to comprehend one.

¹¹⁹⁶ *La Doctrine Spirituelle*, 4th principle, chap. 2 a.2, p. 187. St. John of the Cross expresses the same opinion in *The Dark Night*, Bk. I, chap. 10, and *The Living Flame*, st. 2, v. 5.

¹¹⁹⁷ *La Doctrine Spirituelle*, chap. 3, a. I, p. 91. In the preceding chapter (pp. 88–91), Father Lallemant discusses the different dispositions of religious with regard to perfection. He says: “Among religious there are three kinds: the first refuse nothing to their senses. Are they cold? They warm themselves. Are they hungry? They eat... hardly knowing what it is to be mortified. As for their duties, they discharge them as an obligation, without interior spirit, interior relish, and fruit.... This state is dangerous.

“The second avoid the excesses of the first and refuse themselves satisfactions which they judge unnecessary; but they let themselves be deceived under the appearance of good. In their projects they follow their inclination, then they seek virtuous motives to color their choice and justify their conduct. As for their duties, they perform carefully what pertains to the exterior, but with little interior application and recollection, allowing their senses excessive liberty and neglecting the custody of the heart. Souls in this second class are full of imperfections and venial sins. (Father Lallemant does not believe that they are in the illuminative way.)

“The third, as perfect, are stripped of every desire, indifferent to everything, satisfied with everything, and wish only the good pleasure of God. They join together exterior exactitude and interior application; they keep watch over their hearts, preserve their peace of soul, and practice recollection as much as obedience permits. These receive three signal favors from the three Persons of the Most Blessed Trinity: from the Father, they receive what is, as it were, an invincible fortitude in action, suffering, and temptations; from the Son, rays and splendors of truth which glow unceasingly in their souls; from the Holy Ghost, charming fervor, sweetness, and consolation.”

See also, in this same book, what the author says regarding this subject on pages 113, 187, 191,205, 215, 473.

¹¹⁹⁸ Ibid., 5th principle, chap. 2, a. 2, pp. 301 ff.

¹¹⁹⁹ Ibid., p. 143.

¹²⁰⁰ The same author often says that the gifts of the Holy Ghost are, as it were, bound by attachment to venial sin; they are like sails that are furled and not spread.

¹²⁰¹ Ibid., p. 138.

¹²⁰² Ibid., pp. 121, 304.

¹²⁰³ *The Imitation*, Bk. I, chap. 25.

¹²⁰⁴ Ibid., Bk. II, chap. I.

¹²⁰⁵ Luke 22:62.

¹²⁰⁶ Cf. IIIa,q.89, a.2.

¹²⁰⁷ Cf. II Kings 16:5–11.

¹²⁰⁸ Cf. Dialogue, chaps. 75, 144, 149.

¹²⁰⁹ *Le Livre de la sagesse eternelle*, Part III. chap. 5. from the (Oeuvres mystiques du Bx Henri Suso (French translation by Father Thiriot), 1899, II, 233 ff. Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 224, 269, 274, 280, 284.

¹²¹⁰ Ibid., p. 235.

¹²¹¹ *Instruction sur les etats d’oraison*, Traite I, livre I, nos. 2–3.

¹²¹² Sermons de Tauler (trad. Hugueny et Thery), I, 236–46, 257–69.

¹²¹³ The two classes of persons of whom Blessed Henry Suso spoke, as we have seen, resemble these two groups.

¹²¹⁴ Gal. 5:17: “The flesh lusteth against the spirit.”

¹²¹⁵ Rom 8:26.

[1216](#) David acted thus under the insults of Semei (II Kings 16: 5-II); thus the saints. conducted themselves, as we see in the lives of St. Francis of Assisi, St. Dominic, St. Benedict Joseph Labre, and many others.

[1217](#) The Lord may wish that we should be in our milieu like a little root hidden in the earth, and not like a flower visible to all. The role of the little root which draws secretions from the earth for the sap of the tree, is highly useful; happy they who fulfill it well.

[1218](#) These words indicate that this is the fruit of a great grace, a true conversion.

[1219](#) We remark with Xaverius Hornstein (Les grands mystiques allemands du XIVe siecle, 1922, p. 288) that “Master Eckart grasped mysticism from the aspect of the intellect, Blessed Henry Suso from the aspect of the heart, John Tauler from that of the will,” from the depth of the will, whence his holy austerity, the requisite for very close union with God.

[1220](#) Cf. OEuvres (Hugueny, Thery), I, 257–69.

[1221](#) John 7: 37 f.

[1222](#) (OEuvres, I, 257–69, nos. 2–4.

[1223](#) Ibid., nos. 5 f.

[1224](#) Ibid., nos. 7 f.

[1225](#) Matt. 18:3.

[1226](#) The Dark Night of the Soul, Bk. I, chap. 8.

[1227](#) Ibid., chap. 14.

[1228](#) Ibid., chaps. 2–9.

[1229](#) Cf. St. Thomas, IIa IIae, q.35.

[1230](#) Ibid., a.4; q.36, a.4.

[1231](#) The Dark Night, Bk. I, chap. 2.

[1232](#) Ibid.

[1233](#) We cannot admit, as some have held, that the beginners in question here have already reached the ordinary unitive way by active purification, and that they merit the name of beginners only from a special point of view, since they are setting out, not on the interior way but on the passive ways, considered as more or less extraordinary, outside the normal way. The defects of which St. John of the Cross has just spoken show that real beginners are meant here. He does not employ a special vocabulary; his is the traditional terminology, taken in its full and undiminished meaning.

In these chapters of The Dark Night (Bk. I, chaps. 9 f.), where he deals with the passive night of the senses, St. John of the Cross always says “the beginners who are thus tried.” We see thereby how greatly deceived they are who wish to place this passive purification of the senses not at the entrance to the illuminative way, as St. John of the Cross himself says it is (ibid., chap. 14), but in the middle of the unitive way and after one has been following this way for a notable period of time.

[1234](#) They are what St. Thomas calls reliquiae peccati, which extreme unction should cause to disappear before death. Cf. Supplement, q. 30, a. I.

[1235](#) The Dark Night, Bk. I, chap. 3.

[1236](#) Luke 9:23.

[1237](#) This period of transition has been rightly compared to what happens in children when they are weaned in order that they may have more solid food. They miss the savor of the milk which they are deprived of, and they are not yet accustomed to the taste of the new food that is given them.

[1238](#) Evidently all that St. John says links up rationally; it is also clear that we have to do here with a normal progress of the spiritual life and not something extraordinary, like visions, revelations, or the stigmata.

It is likewise patent that the soul, which until now has meditated according to a reasoned and somewhat mechanical method, should experience the need of a more simple, profound, lively, and loving view of the things of God. It is explicable that it is hardly possible for the soul to return, at least habitually, to a reasoned meditation in three points. Likewise if, after a child begins to read little poems and stories, they are taken away from him and he is put at deciphering the alphabet or spelling out words, he would be unable to tolerate this. He has gone beyond the simple stage. There is no longer any interest for him or any life in spelling since he knows how to read fluently. Life advances, and a man’s life cannot be reduced to what it was ten years earlier; the same is true in the spiritual life.

[1239](#) The Dark Night, Bk. I, chap. 9.

[1240](#) Ibid. In The Ascent of Mount Carmel (Bk. II, chaps. 13f.), St. John of the Cross had already indicated these three signs in order to point out the suitable time to pass

from discursive meditation to contemplation; and even in the Ascent he was speaking of infused contemplation, for in chapter 14 he says that contemplation “is that general knowledge, wherein the spiritual powers of the soul, memory, understanding, and will, are exerted. This general knowledge... is at times so subtle and delicate... that the soul, though in the practice thereof, is not observant or conscious of it.” In chapter 15 the saint says: “But when this state is attained to, meditation ceases, and the faculties labor no more; for then we may rather say that intelligence and sweetness are wrought in the soul, and that it itself abstains from every effort, except only that it attends lovingly upon God, without any desire to feel or see anything further than to be in the hands of God, who now communicates Himself to the soul, thus passive, as the light of the sun to Him whose eyes are opened.” The state described in the passage just quoted is not different from that described in *The Dark Night* (Bk. I, chap. 9).

As is increasingly admitted today, and as the first commentators held (d. “Saint Jean de la Croix,” *Diet. de theol. cath.*), these chapters of *The Ascent* do not describe a state which precedes in time that which *The Dark Night* speaks of (*ibid.*); rather, they show its active aspect, the conduct to be followed then, whereas *The Dark Night* shows its passive aspect.

¹²⁴¹ Cf. St. Thomas, Ia IIae, q. 68, a. 1–3.

¹²⁴² Lib. I de sermone Domini in monte, chap. 4: “Those who weep are they who know by what evils they have been conquered, because they desired them as goods.” They weep over all that concupiscence and pride have made them lose.

¹²⁴³ See Ia IIae, q.9, a.4.

¹²⁴⁴ Eccles. 12: 8.

¹²⁴⁵ Cf. *The Imitation*, Bk. III, chap. 42: “That peace is not to be placed in men; Without Me friendship can neither profit nor endure.” Chap. 43: “Against vain and worldly learning; Never read anything in order that thou mayest appear more learned or more wise.”

¹²⁴⁶ *Le Royaume des amants de Dieu*, chap. 18; *L’Ornement des notes spirituelles*, Bk. II, chap. 5.

¹²⁴⁷ Cf. *L’Ornement des notes spirituelles*, Bk II, chap. 63, in which the gifts of fear, piety, and knowledge, and their purifying influence are discussed.

¹²⁴⁸ *The Dark Night*, Bk. I, chap. 9.

¹²⁴⁹ Cf. Ia IIae, q. 19, a.9, 12.

¹²⁵⁰ Ps. 118: 120.

¹²⁵¹ Cf. Ia IIae, q. 19, a. 12.

¹²⁵² *Ibid.*, q. 139, a.2.

¹²⁵³ Dan. 9:23.

¹²⁵⁴ Bk. II, chap. 12. Ruysbroeck speaks in the same manner of the gift of fortitude in *L’Ornement des notes spirituelles* (Bk. II, chap. 64): “By It man wills to surmount every obstacle and to disregard all consolation in order to find Him whom he loves.”

¹²⁵⁵ The beginning of superdiscursive contemplation interrupts reasoning, which made use of the imagination. Then are produced involuntary distractions of the imagination, which, not being methodically occupied, wanders more or less until it grows drowsy, falls asleep, when the power of the mind (*vis animae*) will be wholly inclined toward loving contemplation in the higher faculties.

These distractions of the imagination are not produced in the theologian while he is reasoning, or in the preacher while he is preaching; their reasoning would be arrested. They are produced at the beginning of superdiscursive contemplation, which does not make use of the linking of images, and the unoccupied imagination cannot by itself become interested in the wholly spiritual object which is then in a confused manner the object of the intellect.

¹²⁵⁶ Cf. Bk. I, chap. 9.

¹²⁵⁷ Cf. Ruysbroeck, *op. cit.*, Bk. II, chap. 66: “The first radiation of the gift of understanding creates simplicity in the spirit,” a participation in the eminent simplicity of God.

¹²⁵⁸ Cf. Ia IIae, q.8, a.7.

¹²⁵⁹ Cf. Ia IIae, q.61, a.5: “Whether the cardinal virtues are fittingly divided into social virtues, perfecting, perfect, and exemplar virtues.”

¹²⁶⁰ See Ia IIae, q. 180, a.6 ad 2um.

¹²⁶¹ Cf. Ia, q.20, a.3 f.

¹²⁶² *De quantitate animae*, Bk. I, chap. 33, fourth step: The life of true virtue. *De sermone in monte*, where he compares the seven gifts with the evangelical beatitudes.

¹²⁶³ Cf. St. Gregory, *Moral.*, XXIV, chap. 6; X, c haps. 10, 17; In *Ezech.*, Bk. II, homil. II, 2, 3, 13. Hugh of St. Victor, *Homil. I in Eccli.* *The Imitation of Christ* Bk. III, chap. 31: This chapter offers a good summary of what we have just said and shows why there are so few contemplatives: because there are so few men detached from the things of the world.

¹²⁶⁴ What we have just said may be summed up in the following table, which should be read from the bottom up:

¹²⁶⁵ Cf. R. de Sinety, *Psychopathologie et direction*, 1934, pp. 66–87.

¹²⁶⁶ Cf. Bk. I, chap. 10.

¹²⁶⁷ Cf. IIa IIae, q.24, a.6.

¹²⁶⁸ *The Dark Night*, Bk. I, chap. 10.

¹²⁶⁹ The word “quiet” used in this connection on several occasions by St. John of the Cross, shows that the state to which he refers corresponds to the fourth mansion of St. Teresa, that of passive recollection and quiet, in which the will is captivated and rests in God under a special inspiration of the Holy Ghost. During this time a certain involuntary wandering of the imagination may be produced, since the imagination, which is not yet lulled, cannot become interested in a purely spiritual object.

¹²⁷⁰ *The Dark Night*, loco cit.

¹²⁷¹ Ibid. At the beginning of this same chapter, St. John declares that it is thus “God makes the soul pass from meditation to contemplation,” that is, to infused contemplation, as has been affirmed. He is not concerned here with acquired contemplation, but with the infusion of the sweet light of life.

¹²⁷² This act is called infused because it would not be produced without a special inspiration of the Holy Ghost, an inspiration which the gifts dispose us to receive. In it there is an influence of the gifts of knowledge and of understanding, which render faith more penetrating and certain. It is one and the same act, which is an act of faith and an act of penetrating faith; there are in it the two subordinated formal motives of the virtue of faith (the authority of God revealing) and of the gift of understanding (the special illumination of the Holy Ghost, as an objective regulation).

We have here something analogous to what is produced in a real musician who, in an artistic rendition of a symphony of Beethoven, receives at a given moment a musical inspiration that makes him penetrate more deeply into the soul of this symphony. Similarly the act of living faith has a meritorious modality which comes to it from charity, a modality which is not in the act of infused faith of a Christian in the state of mortal sin.

¹²⁷³ John 14:26.

¹²⁷⁴ The unction received remains in effect permanently even during our sleep, under the form of sanctifying grace and of the *habitus infusi*, which spring from it, that is, the infused virtues and the seven gifts: the *sacrum septenarium* which the liturgy speaks of, and which is always in all the just.

¹²⁷⁵ Cf. I John 2:27.

¹²⁷⁶ Bk. II, chap. 13.

¹²⁷⁷ *The Dark Night*, Bk. I, chap. 14.

¹²⁷⁸ Cf. Ia IIae, q.52, a.3; IIa IIae, q.24, a.6 ad Ium.

¹²⁷⁹ Tob.12:13.

¹²⁸⁰ Cf. I Cor. 10: 13.

¹²⁸¹ Isa. 40:29,31.

¹²⁸² Ecclus. 34:9.

¹²⁸³ Cf. II Cor. 12: 10.

¹²⁸⁴ Jas. 1:2–4.

¹²⁸⁵ *The Dark Night*, Bk. I, chap. 12.

¹²⁸⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁸⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸⁸ *Life*, by herself, chap. 31.

¹²⁸⁹ *The Way of Perfection*, chap. I2, par. 5.

¹²⁹⁰ *The Dialogue*, chap. 4: “In self-knowledge, then, thou wilt humble thyself, seeing that, in thyself, thou dost not even exist; for thy very being, as thou wilt learn, is derived from Me, since I have loved both thee and others before you were in existence.” Ibid., chaps. 7,9, and 18: “I am who am; you are not in yourselves.”

¹²⁹¹ *The Dark Night*, Bk. I, chap. 13.

¹²⁹² John 8: 12.

¹²⁹³ *The Dark Night*, Bk. I, chap, 9.

¹²⁹⁴ *The Living Flame*, st. 2, v. 5. It is clear that in the opinion of St. John of the Cross these souls show a lack of generosity, which does not appear in those predestined from all eternity to a high degree of perfection, the requisite condition for the special degree of glory which God willed for them. St. John of the Cross speaks of predestination in the same terms as St. Thomas, when he says: “Every soul, according to its measure, great or little, may attain to this union, yet all do not in an equal degree, but only as our Lord shall give unto each, as it is with the blessed in heaven” (*The Ascent of Mount Carmel*, Bk. 2, chap. 5).

On this point see what we have said elsewhere, *Perfection chretienne et contemplation*, 7th ed., II, 472–76; appendix pp. [121J–[125J.

¹²⁹⁵ In Volume I, chapter 14, we stated that, just as there is in the natural order, about the age of fourteen, a crisis of puberty and of the awkward age in the passage from childhood to adolescence, and another at twenty-two years of age, the crisis of first liberty, when the young man leaves his parents In order to live independently—so from the spiritual point of view there is the crisis of the passive purification of the senses, or the night of the senses, at the entrance to the illuminative way, and later on the crisis of the passive purification of the spirit, or night of the spirit, at the entrance to the unitive way of the perfect, who truly merit this name.

¹²⁹⁶ Cf. IIa IIae, q. 180, a.6.

¹²⁹⁷ In the passage from St. Thomas which we have just cited, are mentioned three movements which symbolize the elevation of the contemplative soul toward God: the straight movement, the oblique or spiral movement, and the circular movement.

In the period preceding that which we are speaking of, the soul, starting from sensible things, rose toward God like the bird which often rises with a straight movement toward the sky: for example, it rose from the parable of the prodigal son to the consideration of the mercy of God. In the period following the age of proficients, that is, in the unitive life, the soul often attains to a contemplation called circular. In this contemplation the soul returns a number of times to the consideration of the divine goodness which radiates on all things, somewhat like an eagle, which rises into the air with a spiral movement and then describes the same circle several times while contemplating the sun and its radiation over the entire horizon.

¹²⁹⁸ John 8:31 f.

¹²⁹⁹ Wisd.4:12.

¹³⁰⁰ See I Cor. 4:7.

¹³⁰¹ St. Teresa, *The Interior Castle*, fourth mansion.

¹³⁰² In IIa IIae of the *Summa*, St. Thomas follows a descending way, speaking first of the theological virtues and of the gifts which accompany them, then of the moral virtues, descending from prudence to justice, fortitude, and temperance. St. Thomas proceeds thus in a speculative manner and according to the order of intention, in which the end is willed before the means.

We shall follow the inverse way, according to the order of execution or of realization, which rises toward the obtaining of the end desired. We consider things here in a more practical and concrete manner according to the progress of the proficient toward divine union.

¹³⁰³ Cf. *Summa*, Ia IIae, q. 161, a.5.

¹³⁰⁴ St. Thomas shows especially that the gift of knowledge perfects faith; but he points out that it consequently strengthens hope. This virtue is also assisted by the gift of fear, inasmuch as it preserves the soul from presumption.

¹³⁰⁵ Cf. Ia IIae, q.61, a.3.

¹³⁰⁶ See IIa IIae, q.53, a.5.

¹³⁰⁷ St. Thomas, Ia IIae, q.63, a.4.

¹³⁰⁸ Matt. 10: 16.

¹³⁰⁹ Matt. 24:45–47.

¹³¹⁰ Matt. 25:4.

¹³¹¹ Cf. I Tim. 3:1; I Pet. 4:7.

¹³¹² Rom. 12:16.

¹³¹³ See I Cor. 1: 19.

¹³¹⁴ Matt. 11:25.

¹³¹⁵ Rom. 8:6: “For the wisdom of the flesh is death... an enemy to God.”

¹³¹⁶ Cf. I Cor. 3: 19: “The wisdom of this world is foolishness with God.”

¹³¹⁷ Cf. A. Gardeil, O.P., *La vraie vie chretienne* (1935, 2nd part, I: pp. 99206), “Personal and supernatural self-control,” pp. 115 ff.: “The ancient philosophers compared prudence to the noble driver of a quadriga: auriga virtutum. With his gaze fixed on the road that he is to cover, the driver holds his coursers well in hand. He has an eye for everything, the unevenness of the road, the progress of his rivals, the slightest movements of his steeds, the special character of each of which he knows thoroughly. This one rears, that one shies, the other one kicks in the shafts. In the meantime he handles the reins, and with his voice, and if necessary with the whip, he moderates, regularizes, excites them, employing all his energies to meet the situation, knowing how to change his driving in the course of the race and, so to speak, shaping his interventions in accordance with the spirit of his team. We must transpose this manner of acting into the domain of supernatural conduct...; and this by living experience and vigor of decision unceasingly renewed and nourished at the springs of the living love of God.”

Thus the just man must direct and rule the movements of the sensible appetites; in like manner the director of works, his subordinates; the superior, his subjects; the bishop, his diocese; the supreme pastor, the entire Church.

Thereby we see the elevation of the virtue of prudence, which is below the theological virtues, but above even the virtue of religion, whose acts it directs, like those of justice, fortitude, and temperance, which are like the coursers of the chariot.

¹³¹⁸ Cf. *Ethica*, Bk. II, chap. 1; St. Thomas, Ia IIae, q.64, a. 1.

¹³¹⁹ Cf. Ia IIae, q.58, a.5.

¹³²⁰ *Ethica*, Bk. III, chap. 4.

¹³²¹ See Ia IIae, q.57, a.5 ad 3um. Even if the prudent judgment is speculatively false because of an absolutely involuntary error, it remains practically true. Thus if we cannot know that the beverage presented to us is poisoned, it is not imprudent to judge that we may drink it.

¹³²² The principal act of prudence is indeed the imperium, or command, which directs the execution of the virtuous act that must be placed here and now. Cf. Ia IIae, q.47, a.8.

¹³²³ This truth may be more clearly seen if one observes that the politics of states rarely rise above the economic or material interests of the people, above the tangible, useful good; they give little consideration to the rules of true morality or the honest good, the object of virtue. Then morality disappears in the relations of nations; states sometimes permit enormous collective crimes which they could and should hinder by defending the oppressed and the persecuted. Thereafter the nation must bear the punishment or the terrible results of these unpardonable imprudences and cowardly acts, which negate the moral law and right in order to maintain the primacy of power or of gold. To compensate for these faults there must be an intense interior life in certain souls who may be “the ten just” of whom the Scriptures speak and because of whom God shows mercy.

¹³²⁴ Because of mortal sin, the will is turned directly away from the supernatural last end, and indirectly from the natural last end, for the natural law itself obliges us to obey God, no matter what He may command. Thus every sin against the supernatural last end is indirectly a sin against the natural law.

¹³²⁵ Cf. Ia IIae, q.63, a.2 ad 2um: “Mortal sin is incompatible with divinely infused virtue, especially if this be considered in its perfect state. But actual sin, even mortal, is compatible with humanly acquired virtue; because the use of a habit in us is subject to our will (q.49, a. 3)...; and one sinful act does not destroy a habit of acquired virtue.” Ibid., q.65, a.2: “It is possible by means of human works to acquire moral virtues, in so far as they produce good works that are directed to an end not surpassing the natural power of man; and when they are acquired thus, they can be without charity, even as they were in many of the Gentiles.” Ibid., ad 1um: “Virtue, in the words quoted, denotes imperfect virtue.” On these texts consult the commentary of the *Salmanticenses* and what we said in Part One of this work on the connection of the virtues.

¹³²⁶ Cf. Ia, q.79, a.9: “The higher reason is that which is intent on the contemplation and consultation of things eternal;... the lower reason is that which is intent on the disposal of temporal things.” This is what St. Augustine says in *De Trin.*, Bk. XII, chap. 7.

¹³²⁷ *La Doctrine spirituelle*, 4th principle, chap. 2, a.2. We have already quoted this passage, but there is no harm in quoting it a second time.

¹³²⁸ Cf. St. Thomas, *De dono consilii*, Ia IIae, q.52.

¹³²⁹ *The Dialogue*, chap. 9.

¹³³⁰ Luke 16: 10: “He that is faithful in that which is least, is faithful also in that which is greater.”

¹³³¹ These acts are, in truth, acts of the virtue of religion, directed by prudence. Prudence does not, however, direct the acts of the theological virtues which are superior to it, but it points out when it is suitable, for example, to speak of matters of faith with given persons, and when it is fitting to perform a given act of charity. The theological virtues, which have God Himself for their immediate rule, do not consist in a happy mean determined by prudence, but their exercise is not independent of it. (Cf. Ia IIae, q. 64, a. 4.)

¹³³² A sincere Christian, who was strolling through a large cemetery, saw on almost every tomb a eulogy of the deceased. He felt himself inspired to ask that the following inscription be placed on his tomb: “Here lies a great sinner, who, if he is saved, owes it to the great mercy of God.” He began to glimpse what is from ourselves and what is from God in our lives. “Destruction is thy own, O Israel: thy help is only in Me” (Osee 13:9).

¹³³³ *The Dialogue*, chap. 9.

¹³³⁴ Ibid., chap. II.

- [1335](#) Cf. IIa IIae, q.52, a.4.
- [1336](#) Matt. 24:45–47.
- [1337](#) Ecclus. 34: 1–16.
- [1338](#) Dan. 12:3.
- [1339](#) John 8: 12.
- [1340](#) Cf. Ia IIae, q.56, a.6, c. and ad 3um.
- [1341](#) Ibid., a.4.
- [1342](#) Ibid., q.61, a. 1–3.
- [1343](#) Cf. Deut. S:20 f.
- [1344](#) Cf. IIa IIae, q.61, a.If.
- [1345](#) Ibid., q.58, a.6.; q.60, a. I ad 4um; q.81, a.8 ad 1um.
- [1346](#) Ibid., q.80, a. I ad 3um, ad 5um; q. 120, a. I f., Of “Epikēia” or Equity.
- [1347](#) Cf. Ia IIae, q. 100, a.12: “Justice, like the other virtues, may denote either the acquired or the infused virtue, as is clear from what has been stated (q. 63, a.4). The acquired virtue is caused by works; but the infused virtue is caused by God Himself through His grace.” Acquired justice and its different kinds which we have just named were admirably defined by Aristotle, who even determined in regard to the happy mean the difference between the medium rationis and the medium rei which is determined according to equality in commutative justice and according to proportionality in distributive justice (cf. *Ethica*, Bk. V, chap. 3; St. Thomas, IIa IIae, q.61, a.2). But evidently Aristotle did not speak of infused justice, which is illumined by the supernatural light of faith and of infused prudence.
- [1348](#) Cf. IIa IIae, q.73–75: Of backbiting, tale-bearing, derision.
- [1349](#) Ibid., q.72, a.3.
- [1350](#) Ibid., q.62.
- [1351](#) Ibid., q.63, a. I f.; Ia IIae, q.97, a.4; q.98, a.4.
- [1352](#) When in religious orders dedicated to the apostolate, has been preserved the love of the rule which the saints had, then the spirit of prayer has been kept, studies have flourished and have been made with the spirit of faith, and preaching has been fruitful. We see this in the thirteenth century during the age of St. Dominic, St. Francis, St. Thomas, St. Bonaventure, St. Albert the Great. When, in the fourteenth century, the rule was neglected, the spirit of prayer and study declined, and the ministry was fruitless. The Lord had to send saints anew to restore the first fervor. The reason is that moral and spiritual life is an ensemble and a harmony of either acquired or infused qualities, and when man begins to seek himself through egoism, his thought is not slow in descending to the level of his life, and his apostolic zeal disappears.
- [1353](#) Cf. IIa IIae, q.120, a. I f. Equity is also called in Latin *epikeia*, from the Greek *epi dikaion*, a virtue above simple justice.
- [1354](#) The lawmaker considers what happens in the majority of cases; thus he formulates the law, which in a given case, however, could not be applied, says St. Thomas (ibid.). For example, every deposit should be returned to its owner; it is not advisable, however, to return to a furious man his sword or any weapon, even if he demands it, for it is easy to foresee that he will make bad use of it. The same holds true, should a man reclaim a deposit of money in order to use it against the common good of his country. In these and in similar cases, it would be wrong to follow the written law; common sense tells us that. In these cases a higher justice surpasses the written law. Then one does not judge the law, but only one of its particular applications. Cf. ibid., a. I, c. and ad 2um. For example, if someone should ask you to take a letter to another party which could only pervert him, you can and must avoid giving it to him, and you may even be obliged to prevent the continuation of the evil which might thus be done.
- [1355](#) Cf. IIa IIae, q. 120, a.2: “*Epikēia* is a subjective part of justice; and justice is predicated of it with priority to being predicated of legal justice, since legal justice is subject to the direction of *epikeia*. Hence *epikeia* is by way of being a higher rule of human actions.”
- Cf. D. Lallement, *Principes catholiques d’action civique* (Paris, 1935), pp. 54f.
- [1356](#) Cf. Leo XIII, Encyclical *Graves*, VI, 214 (ed. of La Bonne Presse), and D. Lallement, op. cit., p. 54.
- [1357](#) Cf. IIa IIae, q.29, a.3 ad 3um. Likewise Pius XI, Encyclical *Ubi arcano*, I, 156.
- [1358](#) Cf. Ia IIae, q.61, a.5.
- [1359](#) Ibid.
- [1360](#) Cf. IIa IIae, q.136, a. 1.

- ¹³⁶¹ *De patientia*, chap. 2.
- ¹³⁶² “In your patience you shall possess your souls” (Luke 21: 19).
- ¹³⁶³ As St. Thomas says, IIa IIae, q. 123, a.6 ad 1um: “Endurance is more difficult than aggression for three reasons. First, because endurance seemingly implies that one is being attacked by a stronger person.... Secondly, because he that endures already feels the presence of danger, whereas the aggressor looks upon danger as something to come.... Thirdly, because endurance implies length of time, whereas aggression is consistent with sudden movements.”
- ¹³⁶⁴ Ibid., q. 136, a.4.
- ¹³⁶⁵ Cf. I Cor. 13:4.
- ¹³⁶⁶ *Introduction to a Devout Life*, Part III, chap.3 Of Patience.
- ¹³⁶⁷ Ibid.
- ¹³⁶⁸ Cf. II Thess. 3:5.
- ¹³⁶⁹ Acts 14: 21.
- ¹³⁷⁰ Cf. A. de Boissieu, O.P., *La Patience chez les saints* (ed. *La Vie spirituelle*).
- ¹³⁷¹ Cf. IIa IIae, q. 157, a. 1 f.
- ¹³⁷² Acquired meekness causes the light of reason to descend into the sensibility; infused meekness, that of grace. The two are exercised simultaneously in the lust man, for the acquired virtue is at the service of the infused, as in the artist the agility of his hand is at the service of his art, or the imagination at the service of the intellect.
- ¹³⁷³ *Introduction to a Devout Life*, Part III, chap. 8.
- ¹³⁷⁴ St. Francis de Sales speaks thus for he here considers meekness as a form of charity, which is the highest of the virtues.
- ¹³⁷⁵ It is interesting to note on this point what was accomplished by a spiritual daughter of St. Francis de Sales, Louise de Ballon, who reformed the Bernardines and founded at least seventeen convents in France and Savoy. Cf. *Louyse de Ballon*, by Myriam de G. (Desclee e de Brouwer, 1935), in which the author discusses at length the work of this venerable nun and her teaching, which often reminds one of that of St. John of the Cross. Her maxim was: “Do all in the spirit of prayer.”
- ¹³⁷⁶ *De sermone Domini in monte*, chap. 4.
- ¹³⁷⁷ Cf. IIa IIae, q. 122, a.2.
- ¹³⁷⁸ Isa. 42: 2 f.
- ¹³⁷⁹ Matt. 18:22.
- ¹³⁸⁰ John 1:29.
- ¹³⁸¹ Luke 3:22.
- ¹³⁸² Matt. II: 29.
- ¹³⁸³ Matt. 10:34.
- ¹³⁸⁴ Cf. I Cor. 13:4–8.
- ¹³⁸⁵ Supernatural meekness prepares for contemplation. On this subject we should recall the following just observation: “The certitude of being right is no obstacle to meekness of speech. Violence in speaking the truth indicates the existence of pride. Such a way of speaking is singularly prejudicial to the views one upholds” (Rene Bazin). Man is even more separated from contemplation by taking the point of view of the useful, and not sufficiently that of the honest good. This is, nevertheless, the course of action of many statesmen and also of many nations which enter into conflict with each other because each wishes to consider things “from its own point of view,” that is, under the aspect of its own interest, and not from the general and superior point of view that would unite people, whereas earthly interests divide them.
- ¹³⁸⁶ Christ tells us: “He that can take, let him take it [the counsel of virginity]” (Matt. 19: 12). The Council of Trent, Sess. XXIV, can. 10 (Denz. , no. 981), defined against Luther that the state of virginity or of absolute chastity consecrated to God is superior to the conjugal state. St. Paul clearly says so: “Now concerning virgins, I have no commandment of the Lord; but I give counsel, as having obtained mercy of the Lord, to be faithful. I think, therefore, that this is good for the present necessity, that it is good for man so to be.... But if thou take a wife, thou hast not sinned. And if a virgin marry, she hath not sinned; nevertheless, such shall have tribulation of the flesh. But I spare you.... He that is without a wife is solicitous for the things that belong to the Lord: how he may please God. But he that is with a wife is solicitous for the things of the world: how he may please his wife. And he is divided.... But she that is married thinketh on the things of the world: how she may please her husband.... But if her husband die, she is at liberty. Let her marry to whom she will.... But more blessed shall she be, if she so remain” (I Cor. 7:25–40).
- ¹³⁸⁷ Cf. IIa IIae, q. 151, a.1–3.

[1388](#) Cf. *ibid.*, q. 152, a.3 and ad 5um; a.5.

[1389](#) Cf. *ibid.*

[1390](#) Matt. 5:29 f.

[1391](#) Introduction to a Devout Life, Part III, chap. 13. *Ibid.*, chap. 12: “As one may more easily abstain from anger than regulate it, so it is easier to keep ourselves altogether from carnal pleasures than to preserve a moderation in them.”

[1392](#) *The Imitation*, Bk. I, chap. 6.

[1393](#) *Ibid.*, Bk. II, chap. 8.

[1394](#) John 6:55.

[1395](#) Luke 10:27.

[1396](#) John 13: 33.

[1397](#) Cf. I John 2: I.

[1398](#) *Ibid.*, 12.

[1399](#) *Ibid.*, 28.

[1400](#) *Ibid.*, 3:7.

[1401](#) *Ibid.*, 18.

[1402](#) *Ibid.*, 4:4.

[1403](#) Gal. 4:19 ff..

[1404](#) Cf. II Cor. 11:28 f.

[1405](#) Cf. *supra*, chap 7.

[1406](#) Cf. Vol. I, chap. II.

[1407](#) Acquired humility is conceived from this point of view.

[1408](#) Infused humility is understood here.

[1409](#) John 15:5.

[1410](#) Ps. 38:6.

[1411](#) Cf. I Cor. 4:7.

[1412](#) Matt. 21:42.

[1413](#) Eph.2:19f.

[1414](#) Cf. I Kings 2:6 f.

[1415](#) Cf. II Cor. 3:5.

[1416](#) Cf. I Cor. 12:3.

[1417](#) Ps. 50, *passim*.

[1418](#) Ps. 18:13.

[1419](#) Cf. St. Thomas, IIa IIae, q.161, a. I: “A twofold virtue is necessary with regard to the difficult good: one, to temper and restrain the mind, lest it tend to high things immoderately; and this belongs to the virtue of humility: and another to strengthen the mind against despair and urge it on to the pursuit of great things according to right reason; and this is magnanimity.” *Ibid.*, a.2 ad 3um; q.129, a’3 ad 4um. These two virtues are complementary like the two sides of an ogive. The virtues, from the fact that they are connected, grow together like the five fingers of the hand. Consequently one cannot have profound humility without true nobility of soul or magnanimity.

- [1420](#) Ps.113:1.
- [1421](#) Cf. IIa IIae, q. 161, a.3.
- [1422](#) Ibid., a.6 ad 1um.
- [1423](#) Ps.18:13.
- [1424](#) *De Virginitate*, chap. 52.
- [1425](#) We read this statement in substance in the *Confessions*, Bk. II, chap. 7.
- [1426](#) Ps. 50: 12.
- [1427](#) Jer. 31: 18.
- [1428](#) Ps. 24: 16.
- [1429](#) Cf. Ia, q.20, a.3.
- [1430](#) Cf. I Cor. 4:7.
- [1431](#) Matt. 20: 28.
- [1432](#) *Lib. de similitudinibus*, chaps. 01–9, quoted by St. Thomas, IIa IIae, q. 161, a.6 ad 3um.
- [1433](#) *Life* by herself, chap. 31; *The Way of Perfection*, chap. 12.
- [1434](#) Matt. 20: 28.
- [1435](#) Cf. St. Francis de Sales, *Introduction to a Devout Life*, Part III, chaps. 4–7, in which the saint discusses humility, the voluntary recognition of our abjection and nothingness. Humility conceals the other virtues and seeks to hide itself; it scarcely speaks of humility. Humility which does not produce generosity is without a doubt false. Humility does not neglect the care of a good reputation, but it endures contempt with joy.
- [1436](#) Heb. 1:3.
- [1437](#) Isa. 14: 14.
- [1438](#) Gen. 3:5.
- [1439](#) John 1:1, 18.
- [1440](#) Ecclus. 3:20f.
- [1441](#) Matt. 11:29.
- [1442](#) Wisd.2:20.
- [1443](#) Deut. 21:23.
- [1444](#) Gal. 3:13.
- [1445](#) Heb. 11:26; cf.13:13.
- [1446](#) Ibid., 12:2.
- [1447](#) Cf.. I Cor. 1:23.
- [1448](#) Cf. J. M. Voste, O.P., *Studia Joannea*, p. 323.
- [1449](#) Heb. 10:5,9.
- [1450](#) Luke 2:7.
- [1451](#) Ibid., 2: 14.

[1452](#) Matt. 18:4.

[1453](#) Cf. I Pet. 5:6f.

[1454](#) Jas. 4: 10.

[1455](#) Cf. I Kings 2:6f.

[1456](#) Cf. I Cor. 15:4–9.

[1457](#) Cf. II Cor. 12:7.

[1458](#) Ibid., 11:22–25.

[1459](#) Ibid., 12:7–9.

[1460](#) Ct. Ecclus. 10: 15.

[1461](#) Jas. 4:6.

[1462](#) Acts 9:15.

[1463](#) Cf. II Cor. 12:4.

[1464](#) Cf. I Cor. 7:25.

[1465](#) Ibid., 15: 10.

[1466](#) St. Thomas, *In Epist. II ad Cor.*, 12:7.

[1467](#) Cf. II Cor. 4:7.

[1468](#) Cf. St. Thomas, *Comm. in Ep. ad Hebr. VI.*, lect. I: “Quantum ad aestimationem, semper debet homo esse sicut incedens et tendens ad majora, Phil. 3:12. Non quod jam coeperim aut quod jam perfectus sim.... Et semper debet niti homo transire ad statum perfectum, Phil. 3: 13: Quae retro runt obliviscens, ad ea quae priora sum me extendens.”

[1469](#) Luke I: 46–51.

[1470](#) Luke 14: 11.

[1471](#) Luke 18: 14.

[1472](#) Cf. II Cor. 5:4.

[1473](#) I Cor. 15:53.

[1474](#) Matt. 11:29.

[1475](#) John 3: 16.

[1476](#) We are not concerned here with the motive of the Incarnation, but with that of the immense sufferings of the redemptive Passion, since the smallest act of love of the Savior was sufficient to redeem us.

[1477](#) Isa. 41:8; 48: 11.

[1478](#) I John 1:14.

[1479](#) The author certainly does not mean that by His dolorous passion Christ merited the Incarnation; the principle of merit cannot be merited. However, he does mean, as he says farther on, that Christ thus merited the exaltation of His name, as St. Thomas Aquinas affirms with all tradition.

[1480](#) What He had by right of birth, He had also by right of conquest.

[1481](#) Luke 24: 25 f.

[1482](#) John 7: 38.

[1483](#) Ibid., 39.

[1484](#) Luke 18: 14.

[1485](#) Phil. 2:8–11.

[1486](#) St. Thomas says the same things (IIa, q.46, a. 1): “Christ... merited the glory of being exalted, through the lowliness of His passion.” See also, *ibid.*, a. 3: By His dolorous passion Jesus also manifests to us the excess of His love, even to the folly of the cross. As a result, men are much more enlightened on the gravity of sin and the value of grace, the seed of eternal life, participation in the intimate life of God.

[1487](#) Luke 18: 14.

[1488](#) Cf. Vol. I, chap. 13.

[1489](#) Cf. IIa IIae, q. 184, a.3.

[1490](#) Cf. I Cor. 7:29–31.

[1491](#) St. Thomas, IIIa, q. 23, a. 1 ad 3um: “Spiritual goods can be possessed by many at the same time; not so material goods.” Cf. Ia IIae, q.28, a.4 ad 2um.

[1492](#) Cf. IIa IIae, q.66, a.2: “Two things are competent to man in respect to exterior things. One is the power to procure and dispense them, and in this regard it is lawful for man to possess property.... The second thing that is competent to man with regard to external things is their use. In this respect man ought to possess external things, not as his own, but as common, so that, to wit, he is ready to communicate them to others in their need (I Tim. 6:17f.).” Cf. Ia IIae, q.105, a.2, c.

[1493](#) Cf. I Tim. 6: 17–19.

[1494](#) Cf. IIa IIae, q.32, a.5.

[1495](#) Ps. 10 (according to the Hebrews) 2.

[1496](#) His Holiness, Pius XI, points out in one of his encyclicals that the Lord distributes temporal goods to the good and the bad with holy indifference. Temporal goods have in reality no value in themselves; their worth lies in the use that is made of them in view of eternal life.

[1497](#) The saints have often said that love is an act by which cupidity retrenches its superfluity so that others may have what is necessary.... The Incarnation of the Word is the example of compassion. These thoughts often recur in the *Imitation de la vie pauvre de Notre Seigneur*, a work attributed to Tauler, and in his authentic sermons.

[1498](#) Matt. 6: 25–34.

[1499](#) Mark 10:21 f.

Section 4

¹⁵⁰⁰ *Introduction to a Devout Life*, Part III, chaps. 14–16.

¹⁵⁰¹ *Ibid.*, chap. 15.

¹⁵⁰² Cf. IIIa, q.40, a.3; q.35, a.7.

¹⁵⁰³ Matt. 6:33.

¹⁵⁰⁴ Cf. IIa IIae, q.88, a.6.

¹⁵⁰⁵ This superior influence of love is manifested also in the fact that interior worship excels exterior worship. It is more perfect to offer God our acts of faith, hope, and love, than exterior acts. The theological virtues inspire the virtue of religion, which through love thus renders the worship due to God. Cf. IIa IIae, q.81, a.5 ad 1um.

¹⁵⁰⁶ Cf. St. Thomas, Ia IIae, Q.73, a. 5: “Spiritual sins are of greater guilt than carnal sins.... Spiritual sin denotes more a turning away from something (from God), whence the notion of guilt arises.”

¹⁵⁰⁷ Matt. 21:31 f.

¹⁵⁰⁸ A contemplative religious wrote to us recently as follows: “In our days people have often lost sight of the intrinsic value of religious profession. They no longer see how the great vows chiefly uplift intrinsically the whole of religious life. This profound and superior idea is exiled; it no longer finds a milieu to understand it. Very frequently people think only superficially and extrinsically about this fundamental idea. The influence of the great theology of the Middle Ages has lost its dominion. For this great error, casuists, who have materialized the concept of religious life, are responsible. Under the pretext of avoiding sin, they have considered everything from a negative point of view. Religious obedience has lost its profound meaning. The vows of poverty and chastity, which are more frequently transgressed, and often mortally, have in fact come to the foreground in several manuals; whereas obedience, which is the foundation of the whole edifice, has been placed in the background, because it is rare that disobedience is a mortal sin.

“They have thus actually reversed supernatural values. In many centers this condition of affairs has become a general state of mind. The positive and profound value of religious immolation by the vows, the complete domination of the religious life and of its activity by the virtues of religion and obedience, which render the existence of a religious something ‘sacred,’ has been lost sight of. As a consequence, they no longer see the intrinsic value of the religious life, and some have remarked that this deficiency often works on vocations like a ‘fatal corrosive.’ For many, obedience is no longer anything but a ‘discipline,’ an ‘exterior religious observance,’ a professional practice which one can personally sublimate if one is noble-hearted, as a soldier or a clerk can sublimate the practices of his profession or his position.”

¹⁵⁰⁹ The formal motive of obedience is not that the thing commanded seems reasonable in itself, but that it is commanded by a legitimate superior, the spiritual or temporal representative of God, from whom comes all power to command. If a man obeyed solely because the thing commanded seemed to him essentially reasonable and prudent according to his own judgment, he would lose the merit proper to obedience, as one would lose that of faith if one accepted only evident revealed truths because of their evidence. The formal motive of faith is the authority of God who reveals mysteries that remain obscure. The specific object of obedience, says St. Thomas, “is a command tacit or express, because the superior’s will, however it becomes known, is a tacit precept” (IIa IIae, q. 104, a.2, c. and ad 3um).

¹⁵¹⁰ Obedience demands the conformity of the practical judgment (which immediately directs voluntary choice) to the order given. The thing commanded, materially considered in itself, may be at times imprudent, inopportune; obedience does not then demand its approval as such by a speculative judgment (another superior in a few months will perhaps see the thing in a different light). In this case, let us leave the thing commanded for what it is materially in itself, and consider only that it is formally commanded to us, here and now, and commanded by God, in spite of the imperfection of His messenger. At this moment, it is what we should do, and even if the superior is mistaken, we are not mistaken practically in obeying him. The superior of Margaret Mary Alacoque sometimes sent the fervent religious, during the period set aside for the community meditation, to keep watch over a donkey in a meadow in order to prove her obedience. The religious obeyed and certainly made a better meditation in the meadow than she would have made in choir if she had wished to go there contrary to the will of her superior.

¹⁵¹¹ Rom. 13: 1.

¹⁵¹² Cf. St Thomas, Ia, q. 19, a. 12: Five expressions of the divine will: prohibition, precept, counsel, operation, permission.”

¹⁵¹³ Phil. 2:8.

¹⁵¹⁴ John 4:34.

¹⁵¹⁵ Cf. IIa IIae, q. 104, a. 3, c. and ad 1um.

¹⁵¹⁶ Cf. I Kings 15:22.

¹⁵¹⁷ St. Augustine, *De natura et gratia*, chap. 43. These words are quoted by the Council of Trent, Sess. VI, chap. 11.

¹⁵¹⁸ Prov. 21:28. In this connection we are reminded of the group of martyrs who died singing the *Te Deum*. As they saw the preachers of the faith approaching, they sang in a higher tone: *Te gloriosus apostolorum chorus*; to which the preachers who were also going to be martyred, responded: *Te martyrum candidatus laudat exercitus*. This song recalls the words of St. Ignatius of Antioch, who on hearing the lions that were about to devour him, exclaimed: “I am the wheat of Christ. I shall be ground by the teeth of beasts that I may become the bread of the world.”

[1519](#) Rom. 8:21.

[1520](#) Cf. II Cor. 3: 17.

[1521](#) I Matt. 10: 16.

[1522](#) Job 12: 14.

[1523](#) Cf. IIa IIae, q. 109, a.2 ad 4um: “Simplicity is so called from its opposition to duplicity, whereby a man shows one thing outwardly while having another in his heart: so that simplicity pertains to this virtue. And it rectifies the intention, not indeed directly (since this belongs to every virtue), but by excluding duplicity, whereby a man pretends one thing and intends another.”

Cf. ibid., q. III, a.3 ad 2um: “Wherefore it belongs directly to simplicity to guard oneself from deception, and in this way the virtue of simplicity is the same as the virtue of truth.... There is, however, a more logical difference between them, because by truth we mean the concordance between sign and thing signified, while simplicity indicates that one does not tend to different things, by intending one thing inwardly, and pretending another outwardly.” It is a virtue annexed to justice. Ibid., q.109, a.3.

[1524](#) Let us remember, moreover, that often it is our own fault if we are asked indiscreet questions. If we were more recollected and silent, people would not ask them of us, or at least they would do so only rarely.

[1525](#) Matt. 10: 19 f.

[1526](#) Cf. Ia IIae, q.68, a.2.

[1527](#) Matt. 5: 37.

[1528](#) Cf. IIa IIae, q. 109, a.4.

[1529](#) *Ethica*, IV, chap. 7.

[1530](#) Cf. II Cor. 12:6.

[1531](#) *Introduction to a Devout Life*, Part III, chap. 30.

[1532](#) Matt. 26: 39.

[1533](#) John 18:36f.

[1534](#) Luke 23:46; John 19:30.

[1535](#) Matt. 27:54.

[1536](#) Wisd.1:1.

[1537](#) Prov. 19: 1.

[1538](#) Cf. I Mach. 2:37.

[1539](#) Col. 3:22.

[1540](#) Cf. II Cor. 11:3.

[1541](#) Cf. *Elevations sur les mysteres*, 18e semaine: les elevations sur les paroles du vieillard Simeon.

[1542](#) Encyclical *Quoniam pluries*, August 15. 1899: “Ad illam praestantissimam dignitatem, qua naturis creatis omnibus longissime Deipara antecellit, *non est dubium quin accesserit ipse, ut nemo magis.*”

[1543](#) Cf. *L’Esprit de sainte Therese de l’Enfant-Jesus*, 1923. pp’ 163–86.

[1544](#) Ibid., p. 169.

[1545](#) Ibid., p. 183.

[1546](#) Ibid., pp. 185 f.

[1547](#) Quoted by Father H. Petitot, O.P., *Sainte Therese de Lisieux* (1925), p. 173.

[1548](#) Ibid., p. 176.

[1549](#) Ibid., p. 178. Cf. *Sainte Therese de L'Enfant-Jesus, histoire d'une ame par elle-meme*, chap. 9, reduced edition, p. 185.

[1550](#) Quoted by Father H. Petitot, *ibid.*, p. 178.

[1551](#) Cf. *The Imitation*, Bk. II, chap. 4: "Of a Pure Mind and a Simple Intention. Simplicity aimeth at God.... If thou wert inwardly good and pure, then wouldst thou discern all things without impediment, and comprehend them well. A pure heart penetrates heaven and hell."

[1552](#) Gal. 3: II.

[1553](#) Cf. St. Thomas, IIa IIae, q.15, and I Cor. z: 14: "But the sensual man perceiveth not these things that are of the spirit of God; for it is foolishness to him."

[1554](#) Matt. 15:27 f.

[1555](#) Cf. St. Thomas, IIa IIae, q.2, a.2 ad 1um: "These three (to believe in a God, to believe God, to believe in God) do not denote different acts of faith, but one and the same act having different relations to the object of faith." By a single and identical, essentially supernatural and simple act, the believer adheres infallibly to God who reveals, and believes a given mystery that is revealed, such as the Trinity, the Incarnation.

[1556](#) Cf. *supra*, I, O 52–55.

[1557](#) Eph. 2:8: "For by grace you are saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, for it is the gift of God."

[1558](#) Cf. I Cor. 2: 12–16.

[1559](#) Heb. 11:1.

[1560](#) Rom.3:22.

[1561](#) Cf. Ia, q.62, a.2.

[1562](#) *Treatise on the Love of God*, Bk. II, chap. 14.

[1563](#) Cf. *ibid.*, chap. 17.

[1564](#) Cf. IIa IIae, q.5, a. 4.

[1565](#) *Ibid.*, ad 3um.

[1566](#) Matt. 6: 30.

[1567](#) Luke 24:25.

[1568](#) Matt. 15:28.

[1569](#) Heb. 10: 38.

[1570](#) Luke 17:5.

[1571](#) Matt.21: 22.

[1572](#) Heb. 11:17ff.

[1573](#) *Ibid.* 12: 1f.

[1574](#) *Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews*, 12:3.

[1575](#) John 1:1, 18.

[1576](#) Ps. 2:7.

[1577](#) Heb. 1:5.

[1578](#) Johu 1:14.

[1579](#) *Ibid.*, 11–13.

[1580](#) *Ibid.*, 16.

- [1581](#) Ibid., 14:23.
- [1582](#) Phil. 4:4, 7.
- [1583](#) Rom. 8: 28.
- [1584](#) Therefore we see why in temptations against faith we must not reply to the enemy or pretend to hear what he says. We must repulse these temptations, or better, rise above them by more intense acts of faith. The Lord permits them only that they may aid our progress. Cf. St. Francis de Sales, Letter 737 to the Baroness de Chantal.
- [1585](#) The formal motive of a theological virtue cannot be something created, no matter how noble; it can only be God Himself, in this case, God, our Helper.
- [1586](#) Cajetan says very clearly, In IIam Ilae, q. 17, a. 5, no. 6: “Desidero Deum, mihi, non propter me, sed propter Deum.” We desire God for ourselves without subordinating Him to ourselves, whereas we desire a fruit, which is inferior to us, for ourselves and for our own sake. The last end of the act of hope is God Himself.
- [1587](#) Cf. Ila Ilae, q.2, a.1, and *De veritate*, q.14, a.1: The certitude which arises from evidence.
- [1588](#) Cf. ibid., q.4, a.8: Certitude without evidence, but based on the authority of God revealing.
- [1589](#) Cf.. Ia Ilae, q.57, a.5 ad 3um: Certitude through conformity with a right appetite.
- [1590](#) Cf. Ila Ilae, q.45, a.2: Certitude by connaturality or sympathy with divine things, under the special inspiration of the Holy Ghost.
- [1591](#) Ibid., q.18, a.4.
- [1592](#) The Council of Trent (Sess. VI, chap. 13) defined this point against the Protestants.
- [1593](#) Cf. Ila Ilae, q. 18., a.4.
- [1594](#) Cf. Council of Trent (Denzinger, *Enchiridion*, no. 804).
- [1595](#) Phil. 2:13.
- [1596](#) Cf. I Cor. 10:12.
- [1597](#) Phil. 11: 12.
- [1598](#) Cf. II Cor. 6:3 ff.
- [1599](#) Rom. 8: 13. Cf. Council of Trent, Sess. VI, chap. 13 (Denzinger, no. 806).
- [1600](#) Matt. 10:12.
- [1601](#) Cf. II Tim. 1:5.
- [1602](#) Cf. Ila Ilae, q. 161, a. I ad 3um, and a.2 ad 3Uffi; q. 162, a.1 ad 3um; q.129, a.3 ad 4um.
- [1603](#) Rom. 8:31.
- [1604](#) Cf. I Cor. 10: 13.
- [1605](#) Job 13:15.
- [1606](#) Rom. 4: 18.
- [1607](#) Rom. 5:2–5.
- [1608](#) Acts 14:21.
- [1609](#) Jas. 1:2f.
- [1610](#) Wisd.3:4–6.
- [1611](#) Ecclus. 2: 11.
- [1612](#) *Comm. in ep. ad. Rom.*, 5:2. For those who wish not only to distinguish but, as it were, to separate asceticism from mysticism, it is difficult to say, in reading the Epistles of St. Paul and the commentaries of the fathers and doctors, where asceticism ends and mysticism begins. In reality, mysticism commences when the superhuman mode of the gifts of the Holy Ghost begins to prevail, in particular of the gifts of understanding and wisdom: that is, when, under the special inspiration of the Holy Ghost,

we penetrate and taste the mystery of faith: “Taste and see that the Lord is sweet.”

[1613](#) Heb. 11: 19.

[1614](#) Rom. 8:28.

[1615](#) *The Dialogue*, chap. 60.

[1616](#) Cf. *supra*, chap. 3. pp. 30 f.

[1617](#) In the Book of Judith (8:22), Abraham is called the friend of God. Wisdom (7:27) says that the just man lives in the divine friendship. And Christ especially tells us: “I will not now call you servants... but I have called you friends.”

[1618](#) Cf. *Ia IIae*, q.23, a.1.

[1619](#) Cf. St. Thomas, *Ia*, q.60, a.5; *Ia IIae*, q.26, a.3. See also St. Francis de Sales, *Treatise on the Love of God*, Bk. I, chaps. 9, 16–18.

[1620](#) *Summa*, *Ia IIae*, q.109, a.3.

[1621](#) In supernatural attrition which, with the sacrament of penance, justifies the soul, there is an initial love of benevolence, according to many theologians; but there is not yet community of life, the convivere, for there is not the state of grace.

[1622](#) St. Thomas shows that therein lies the essence of charity.

[1623](#) In *Ia IIae*, q. 112, a.5, St. Thomas speaks of these signs, and he adds others in the *Contra Gentes*, Bk. IV, chaps. 21 f. Among these last signs, St. Thomas enumerates the following: “To converse with one’s friend, to delight in his presence, to be of one mind with one’s friend through conformity of will, the liberty of the sons of God is in this conformity, most willingly to speak of God or to hear the word of God.”

[1624](#) John 13:35.

[1625](#) Cf. I Cor. 13:4–7.

[1626](#) In his treatise on charity (*Ia IIae*, q.24, a. 3), St. Thomas writes: “Since charity surpasses the proportion of human nature,... (and of angelic nature) it depends, not on any natural virtue, but on the sole grace of the Holy Ghost who infuses charity.” Cf. Eph. 4:7: “To everyone of us is given grace according to the measure of the giving of Christ.” Cf. Rom. 12: 3; I Cor. 12:11.

St. Thomas likewise says (*Ia IIae*, q. 109, a.6): “Man cannot prepare himself to receive the light of grace except by the gratuitous help of God moving him inwardly.” *Ibid.*, q. 112, a.3, and also a.4: “The first cause of this diversity [of graces] is to be sought on the part of God, who dispenses His gifts of grace variously, that the beauty and perfection of the Church may result from these various degrees.”

[1627](#) Thus it is, as has often been said, that meekness dominated in St. Francis de Sales, and fortitude in St. Jane de Chantal.

[1628](#) *Treatise on the Love of God*, Bk. XII, chap. I.

[1629](#) Those who do not wish to admit that mystical contemplation proceeds from infused faith illumined by the gifts of wisdom and understanding, and who thus misunderstand the traditional doctrine of the seven gifts of the Holy Ghost granted to all the just, may seek to explain the mystical life in two very different manners.

Some, whose minimizing of the necessity of grace here recalls Pelagian naturalism, will apply their doctrine not to common Christian life but to the mystical life. They will declare that the mystical life is explained especially by the natural qualities of certain persons who are more emotional and poetical than others. In this system there is danger of confounding the true mysticism of the great servants of God, for instance, of St. John of the Cross and St. Teresa, with the sentimentality or the affectation of sentiment which they combated ardently, teaching that in the interior life we must not seek to feel consolation, but to tend toward God in aridity as well as in joy.

Others, on the contrary, to escape admitting that the infused contemplation of the mysteries of faith and the union with God resulting from it is in the normal way of sanctity, will seek to explain the mystical life by extraordinary graces, such as prophecy, and will not adequately distinguish it from visions and revelations. St. John of the Cross, on the other hand, continually insisted on this distinction, maintaining that as much as one should desire the close union with God, which becomes the transforming union, just so much should one avoid the desire of extraordinary and, as it were, exterior graces, such as visions and revelations. These deviations show how important it is to preserve the traditional doctrine on the relations of the life of grace to our natural dispositions.

[1630](#) Cf. St. Francis de Sales, *Treatise on the Love of God*, Bk. VIII, chap. 3; Bk. IX, chap. 6.

[1631](#) Cf.. *Summa*, *Ia*, q. 19, a. 11 f., and *Ia IIae*, q. 19, a.9 f.

[1632](#) John 4:34.

[1633](#) Rom.8:28.

[1634](#) *Treatise on the Love of God*, Bk. VI, chap. 15.

[1635](#) Cf. I Cor.4:11, 13.

- [1636](#) *The Love of God*, Bk. IX, chap. 16.
- [1637](#) Ibid.
- [1638](#) The signified will of God is thus the domain of obedience, and His will of good pleasure not yet manifested is the domain of abandonment.
- [1639](#) Cf. L’Esprit de saint Francois de Sales, Part XV, chap. 13.
- [1640](#) John 8: 12.
- [1641](#) Cf. St. Alphonsus Liguori, Opusc. *Uniformita alla volonta di Dio*.
- [1642](#) Summa, IIa IIae, q.24, a.10.
- [1643](#) *Treatise on the Love of God*, Bk. XI, chap. 20.
- [1644](#) This opinion is held by Fathers Arintero, O.P., Gardeil, O.P., Msgr. A. Saudreau, Father Gabriel of St. Magdalen, O CD., and several modern writers of the same Order; also by Father A. Rozwadowski, S.J.; cf. *La Vie Spirituelle*, January, 1936, suppl. pp. [1]-[28].
- [1645](#) Cf. infra, chap. 29, for a discussion of the errors of the quietists in regard to contemplation and pure love.
- [1646](#) Matt. 19: 19; 22:39; Mark 12:31; Luke 10:2.7; John 13:34.
- [1647](#) John 13:34f.
- [1648](#) Cf. I John 4:20.
- [1649](#) Matt. 5:44, 46, 48.
- [1650](#) Summa, IIa IIae, q.23, a.1 ad 2um: “Indeed, so much do we love our friends, that for their sake we love all who belong to them, even if they hurt or hate us; so that, in this way, the friendship of charity extends even to our enemies, whom we love out of charity in relation to God, to whom the friendship of charity is chiefly directed.”
- [1651](#) Matt. 5: 38–48.
- [1652](#) John 13:34; 15:12–17.
- [1653](#) Cf. I Cor. 13:4.
- [1654](#) Summa, IIa IIae, q.25, a. I.
- [1655](#) Cf. ibid.
- [1656](#) Cf. Ia, q.21, a.4 ad 1um.
- [1657](#) Summa, IIa IIae, q.16, a.7.
- [1658](#) Ibid., a.8–12.
- [1659](#) Myriam de G., *Louise de Ballan, reformatrice des Bernardines*, 1935, p.317.
- [1660](#) Cf. I Cor. 3:4–7.
- [1661](#) Ibid., 1: 13.
- [1662](#) Ibid., 3:21–23.
- [1663](#) John 15:12.
- [1664](#) Matt. 7: 1–5.
- [1665](#) Rash judgment must, therefore, be distinguished from rash doubt, suspicion, or opinion relative to the probity of another; an opinion of this kind is generally a venial sin. On the contrary, St. Thomas (IIa IIae, q.60, a.3) says of rash judgment: “This is a mortal sin, if it be about a grave matter, since it cannot be without contempt of one’s neighbor.” Consequently, in doubtful matters he must be given the benefit of the doubt. Cf. IIa IIae, q.60, a.4.
- [1666](#) However, without rashly judging a person who is somewhat suspect, one may take precautions to avoid being deceived by him in a case in which he would have a bad intention. Thus, without rashly judging his servants, a householder keeps certain precious articles under lock and key; and at times he intentionally leaves money on a table to see if it will be taken.

¹⁶⁶⁷ Summa, IIa IIae, q.60, a.3.

¹⁶⁶⁸ Matt. 18: 15-17: “If thy brother shall offend against thee, go, and rebuke him between thee and him alone. If he shall hear thee, thou shalt gain thy brother. And if he will not hear thee, take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may stand. And if he will not hear them, tell the church.”

¹⁶⁶⁹ Summa, IIa IIae, q.33, a.1, 2.

¹⁶⁷⁰ Ibid.

¹⁶⁷¹ John 13:34.

¹⁶⁷² Matt. 5:40.

¹⁶⁷³ Cf. I Cor. 12: 15–21, 24–27.

¹⁶⁷⁴ John 17:22.

¹⁶⁷⁵ Acts 4:31.

¹⁶⁷⁶ John 17:22 f.

¹⁶⁷⁷ *Summa*, Ia IIae, q.28, a.4: “Zeal, whatever way we take it, arises from the intensity of love.... For in the love of concupiscence he who desires something intensely, is moved against all that hinders his gaining or quietly enjoying the object of his love.... Love of friendship seeks the friend’s good: wherefore, when it is intense, it causes a man to be moved against everything that opposes the friend’s good.... In this way, too, a man is said to be zealous on God’s behalf, when he endeavors, to the best of his means, to repel whatever is contrary to the honor or will of God; according to III Kings 19: 14: ‘With zeal have I been zealous for the Lord... of hosts.’ “Likewise, Ps. 68: 10: “The zeal of Thy house hath eaten me up.” Cf. IIa IIae, q.36. a.2.

¹⁶⁷⁸ Luke 10:27.

¹⁶⁷⁹ Deut. 6:5.

¹⁶⁸⁰ Ps. 68: 10.

¹⁶⁸¹ Ps. 118:139, 141.

¹⁶⁸² Cf. III Kings 19: 10.

¹⁶⁸³ Cf. I Mach. 2:54–64.

¹⁶⁸⁴ Matt. 21:13.

¹⁶⁸⁵ Luke 12:49.

¹⁶⁸⁶ Heb. 10: 5–7.

¹⁶⁸⁷ Luke 2:49.

¹⁶⁸⁸ It is often thus. When a person is to glorify God greatly, not infrequently obstacles come from those who should have helped him. In the Old Testament we find an illustration of this point in the story of Joseph, who was sold by his brothers. Christ also said: “A prophet is not without honor, save in his own country, and in his own house. And He wrought not many miracles there [in Nazareth], because of their unbelief” (Matt. 13:57 f.). “And a man’s enemies shall be they of his own house” (Matt. 10:36); this saying was often verified during the three centuries of persecution of the primitive Church.

¹⁶⁸⁹ Luke 22: 15.

¹⁶⁹⁰ Ibid., 19 f.

¹⁶⁹¹ Heb. 7:15.

¹⁶⁹² Acts 5:41.

¹⁶⁹³ Cf. II Cor. 12: 15.

¹⁶⁹⁴ Cf. I Cor. 4: 11–13.

¹⁶⁹⁵ Mark 3: 17.

¹⁶⁹⁶ Mark 9:31 f., and Matt. 18:2 f.

[1697](#) Matt. 20:22 f., 17 f.

[1698](#) Cf Vol I, chap.3, a. 4.

[1699](#) Summa, Ia IIae, q.68, a. 1,2.

[1700](#) John 3:8.

[1701](#) Isa. 11:2.

[1702](#) Rom. 5:5.

[1703](#) Summa, Ia IIae, q.68, a.5.

[1704](#) Cf. Louis Lallemant, S.J., *La Doctrine spirituelle*, 4th principle, a.3.

[1705](#) Cf. Vol. I, chap. 3. a.5, pp. 88–96: Actual grace, its various forms, the fidelity which it demands.

[1706](#) Summa, Ia IIae, q. 111, a. 2.

[1707](#) Docility to the Holy Ghost is analogous to that of the perfectly obedient man toward his superior. He who obeys does not deliberate in order to determine what should be done, but he accepts promptly and freely in a meritorious manner the order given. His superior acts through him; he himself has the merit of obedience, which can increase his strength tenfold; for he cannot be deceived in obeying, and God will not refuse him the grace necessary for the fulfillment of the order received and accepted.

[1708](#) On the subject of the Messiah, we read in Isaiah (II: 2): “And the Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon Him: the spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the spirit of counsel and of fortitude, the spirit of knowledge and of godliness. And He shall be filled with the spirit of the fear of the Lord.” At the end of verse two, instead of “the fear of the Lord” the Septuagint and the Vulgate place “piety;” which has practically the same meaning, especially in the Old Testament, where the fear of the Lord is of great importance.

On is gradation of the gifts, cf. St. Thomas, Ia IIae, q.68, a.7; also St. Augustine, I, *De sermone Domini in monte*, chap. 4; St. Francis de Sales, I *le Sermon pour le jour de la Pentecote*.

St. Thomas (loc. cit.) remarks on the subject of this ascending gradation, that the gifts of contemplation, which direct the others, are superior to them; but that, according to the classical enumeration which has its origin in the text of Isaiah 11: 2, the gifts of fortitude and counsel are superior to those of knowledge and piety, for fortitude and counsel are given for difficult things, whereas knowledge and piety are for common things. In Isaiah 11: 2, the gifts are enumerated according to a descending gradation which reminds us of that of the petitions in the Our Father, whereas in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5), the beatitudes which correspond to them are enumerated according to an ascending gradation.

[1709](#) Summa, IIa IIae, q. 19.

[1710](#) Ps. 110: 10.

[1711](#) Summa, IIIa, q.7, a.6.

[1712](#) Ibid., IIa IIae, q. 121.

[1713](#) Rom. 8: 15, 26.

[1714](#) Summa, IIa IIae, q.9. By the gift of knowledge, certain saints, like St. Francis of Assisi, see particularly how sensible things are the symbol of spiritual things. By this same gift, others, like the author of The Imitation, see in a striking manner the emptiness of created things.

[1715](#) St. Paul refers evidently to the gift of fortitude when he says (Eph. 6: 1013): “Be strengthened in the Lord and in the might of His power. Put you on the armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the deceits of the devil. For our wrestling is not [only] against flesh and blood; but against principalities and powers, against the rulers of the world of this darkness, against the spirits of wickedness in high places. Therefore take unto you the armor of God, that you may be able to resist in the evil day, and to stand in all things perfect.”

[1716](#) Summa, IIa IIae, q. 139, a. I, 2.

[1717](#) Ibid., q. 51, a. 1–4.

[1718](#) Ibid., IIa IIae, q. 8, a. 1, 4, 6,7.

[1719](#) Ibid., q. 45, a. 1,2,5,6.

[1720](#) Ibid., q.46, De stultitia, a. 1, 2.

[1721](#) Christ said (Matt. II: 6): “Blessed is he that shall not be scandalized in Me.” The aged Simeon also declared (Luke 2:34): “This Child is set for the fall and for the resurrection of many in Israel, and for a sign which shall be contradicted.” Cf. Bossuet, *Elevations sur les mysteres*, 18e semaine, for splendid meditations on these words

of the holy aged Simeon.

[1722](#) The value of supernatural wisdom appears rather frequently by the contrast of certain judgments. For example, when a presumptuous young man puts on the airs of a critic or of a man of broad study and says with affected calm: “There is a much read book, *The Imitation*, which does great harm by its spirit which is opposed to study,” we have a striking case of that spiritual folly to which St. Thomas devoted the question in his Summa, which follows the articles on the gift of wisdom. When *The Imitation* (Bk. III, chap. 43) says that study which is not ordained to God and the salvation of souls, but to vain self-content, is nothing in comparison with the wisdom of the saints, it simply affirms the rights of God, our sovereign Good and last End, and His infinite superiority to every purely human end. St. Thomas speaks in like manner in his commentary on Matt. 7:26, apropos of “A foolish man that built his house upon the sand”: “Some hear that they may know (not that they may do and love), and these build on the intellect (only), and this is a building on sand., (one must build) on charity.”

[1723](#) Ps. 94:8.

[1724](#) John 3:8.

[1725](#) Ps. 138: 11.

[1726](#) John 4: 34.

[1727](#) This act of consecration to the Holy Ghost was enriched with an indulgence of 300 days by His Holiness Pius X.

[1728](#) *La Doctrine spirituelle*, 4th principle, chap. I, a. 3. Father Lallemand adds (Ibid.): “What renders them incapable of judging rightly of these things, is that they are entirely exterior souls, completely engrossed in external activity and with only a meager spiritual life, never having risen above the lowest degrees of mental prayer. And what leads them to judge these things is that they do not wish to appear ignorant in these matters, of which, nevertheless, they have neither experience nor knowledge.”

[1729](#) Ibid., chap. 2.

[1730](#) Ibid., a. 1, 3.

[1731](#) St. Thomas, Ia IIae, q. 114, a.9.

[1732](#) Rom. 8:16.

[1733](#) Eph. 1:14.

[1734](#) Op. cit., 4th principle, chap. 1, art. 4.

[1735](#) Stanza 26, par. 2. f.

[1736](#) Cf. I Cor. 12:10.

[1737](#) Cf. PG, XXVI, 894 f.; St Athanasius, *Life of St. Anthony*. Ct. *Dictionnaire de spiritualite*, “Antoine,” by Bardy. It is generally recognized that St. Anthony described the rules for the discerning of spirits with a precision which equals that of St. Ignatius.

[1738](#) *De discretione spirituum*, chap. 6.

[1739](#) *The Spiritual Exercises*, 4th week.

[1740](#) *Discernimento de’ spiriti*.

[1741](#) Cf. I John 4: 1.

[1742](#) John 1:12 f.

[1743](#) Matt. 7:15–18. St. Thomas in his Commentary on St. Matthew (loc. cit.) says that the ravening wolves that present themselves in the clothing of sheep are heretics, and next bad prelates.

[1744](#) *Commentary on St. Matthew*, chap. 7.

[1745](#) Ecclus. 6:8.

[1746](#) Cf. I Cor. 2:14.

[1747](#) Gal. 5:22 f.

[1748](#) We give here only general principles for the discerning of spirits. True, we should not disdain empirical rules and evidences which make possible, as we shall see farther on, the characterization of states. But, as Father R. Regamey, O.P., says in a recent article, “*Reflexions sur la theologie spirituelle*” (*La Vie spirituelle*, December, 1938, suppl. pp. [151] ff.): “We shall act only very slightly on the life of grace as a physician on physical life by the direct influence of well-determined processes, corresponding to one of the states that we think we have recognized. Our procedures will be little different. Their worth will be in proportion as they cause souls

to practice the sole means, which is the effective love of God above all else and of neighbor as oneself.... To detail ways of acting which seem particular to each state is often to provoke illusions, if one understands these indications as rules and not as simple counsels which cause one to reflect and which render prudence more docile. In any case, it is stopping at what is accidental” (ibid., p. [161]).

[1749](#) Cf. Vol. I, chap. 31.

[1750](#) Ibid.

[1751](#) Heb. 7:25.

[1752](#) Deut. 6:13.

[1753](#) Matt. 4:9.

[1754](#) Matt. 26: 39.

[1755](#) Tob. 13:2; cf. Deut. 32:39.

[1756](#) Wisd. 16: 13.

[1757](#) Summa, IIIa, q.48, a.2.

[1758](#) Gen. 22: 12.

[1759](#) Gen. 22: 16 f.

[1760](#) Heb. 5:7,9.

[1761](#) Heb. 7:25.

[1762](#) John 19:30.

[1763](#) Wisd. 16: 13.

[1764](#) To live profoundly by the Mass, we recommend the book of Father C. Grimaud, *Ma Messe* (Tequi, 17th ed.), which shows how we should unite ourselves practically to our Lord’s sacrifice perpetuated on the altar by recalling the four ends of the sacrifice. The author also sets forth at length the fruits of the Mass as well for the living as for the dead.

[1765](#) Cf. I Cor. 15:31.

[1766](#) *The Imitation*, Bk. III, chap. 47.

[1767](#) Cf. Vol. I, chap. 32.

[1768](#) Cf. St. Thomas, *In Epist. ad Hebraeos*, 10:15: “The natural motion (i.e., of a falling stone) grows the more (in proportion) as it more nearly approaches its end. The contrary is true of violent motion (e.g., of a stone cast into the air). Grace likewise follows the motion of nature. Therefore those who are in the state of grace ought to grow more in proportion as they draw nearer to their end.”

[1769](#) John 13:35.

[1770](#) This subject was treated at the International Eucharistic Congress which took place in Manila in 1937.

[1771](#) Cf. I Cor. 10: 16 f.

[1772](#) PG, LXI, 200.

[1773](#) PL, XXXV, 1612.

[1774](#) I n *Joannem*, tract. 26. *Summa*, IIIa, q.79, a.1.

[1775](#) Bk. IV, chap. 9.

[1776](#) Eph. 4:13–16.

[1777](#) Summa, IIIa, q. 73, a. 3.

[1778](#) Ibid.

- [1779](#) Cant. 5: 10.
- [1780](#) Isa. 45:15.
- [1781](#) Wisd. 12: 1.
- [1782](#) *The Imitation*, Bk. IV, chap. 13.
- [1783](#) Ps. 30: 20.
- [1784](#) Bk. IV, chap. 14.
- [1785](#) Ibid., chap. 17.
- [1786](#) John 13:34.
- [1787](#) Words taken from the prayer to the Eucharistic heart of Jesus.
- [1788](#) Antoine Lestra, *Le Pere Chevrier*, Paris, 1934, p. 165: “Le tableau de Saint-Fons.”
- [1789](#) John 13:34.
- [1790](#) Treatise on the True Devotion to Mary. The Secret of Mary.
- [1791](#) Summa, IIa IIae, q.82, a. I: “Devotion is apparently nothing else but the will to give oneself readily to things concerning the service of God.”
- [1792](#) A distinction must be made, however, between the worship of latria due to God and the humanity of the Savior personally united to the Word, and the worship of hyperdulia, due to the Blessed Virgin.
- [1793](#) Treatise on the True Devotion to Mary, chap. 2, a.1.
- [1794](#) Ibid., chap. 4, a.6.
- [1795](#) Ibid., chap. 3. a. 1.
- [1796](#) Cf. Summa, IIIa. q.89. a.2.
- [1797](#) Ibid., chap. 4. a. 4 f.
- [1798](#) This is the essential part of the consecration at the close of St. Grignon de Montfort’s *Treatise on the True Devotion to Mary*. Mention is made there, in contrast to the slavery of sin, of a holy slavery of love which some have not always clearly understood. It in no way diminishes the wholly filial affection which we should have for Mary, but in the formula itself some souls prefer to place the emphasis on this filial character of our relations with the Mother of God.
- [1799](#) Introduction a l’union intime avec Dieu, d’apres l’Imitation (4th ed.; Paris: Tequi, 1916), p. 9.
- [1800](#) Cf. *I Sent.*, disc. 14. q. 2, a.2 ad 3 umn; *Comm. in Ep. Rom.*, 8: 16. Cf. IIa IIae, q.180, a.1, 2, 4, 7; q.45, a.2; q.8, a.6, 7, 8.
- [1801](#) *The Dark Night*, Bk. II, chap. 5.
- [1802](#) *The Love of God*, Bk. VI. chaps. 3, 5, 7, 10.
- [1803](#) Ps. 54:7.
- [1804](#) Bk. III, chap. 31.
- [1805](#) Bk. III, chap. 43.
- [1806](#) Ps. 33:9.
- [1807](#) The general and remote call is expressed in the Gospel and preaching; the individual and proximate call comes from a special inspiration of the Holy Ghost, which an enlightened and experienced director may rather easily recognize. We explained this subject at greater length in *Christian Perfection and Contemplation*, pp. 337–45, 372–436.
- [1808](#) Bk. IV, chap. 13.
- [1809](#) BkII, chap. 1.

- [1810](#) *The Imitation*, Bk. I. chaps. 2 f; Bk. III. chaps. 4. 8.
- [1811](#) Bk. II. chaps. 4. 6. 7, 8; Bk. III. chap. 5.
- [1812](#) Bk. II, chap. 8.
- [1813](#) Bk. IV, chap. 4. This is the union of enjoyment through Eucharistic Communion. The Latin version brings out the thought more clearly: “Vis ergo, Domine, ut te suscipiam, et me ipsum tibi in caritate uniam. Unde tuam precor clementiam et specialem ad hoc imploro mihi donari gratiam, ut totus in te liquefiam et amore pereffluam, atque de nulla aliena consolatione amplius me intromittam.”
- [1814](#) Cf. Vol. I, chaps. 35 f.
- [1815](#) Bk. VI, chaps. 2, 3, 5, 6, 7.
- [1816](#) Part II, chap. 2.
- [1817](#) *Treatise on the Love of God*, Bk. VI, chap. 3.
- [1818](#) Ibid., chap. 6.
- [1819](#) Ibid., chap. 3.
- [1820](#) Ibid., chap. 5.
- [1821](#) Ibid., Bk. VI, chap. 6.
- [1822](#) Ibid., Bk. IX, chap. 2: “The union of our will with the good pleasure of God is made principally in tribulations”; chap. 11: “On the perplexity of the heart which loves, without knowing whether it is pleasing to the Beloved”; chs. 12–14: “On the death of the will (mystical death) and holy indifference”; chap. 16: “On the perfect denudation of the soul united to the will of God.”
- [1823](#) Ibid., Bk. VI, chap. 6.
- [1824](#) Ibid., chap. 7.
- [1825](#) Cf. *Ia IIae*, q.180.
- [1826](#) Ibid., a.3, 4, 6.
- [1827](#) Ibid., a. I; *ibid.*, a.7 ad 1um: “It is through charity that one is urged to the contemplation of God. And since the end corresponds to the beginning, it follows that the term also and the end of the contemplative life has its being in the appetite, since one delights in seeing the object loved, and the very delight in the object seen arouses a yet greater love.” Cf. *ibid.*, a.3 ad 3um.
- [1828](#) Cf. *Ia IIae*, q.8, a. I, 2, 4, 6, 7; q.45, a. 1, 2, 5, 6.
- [1829](#) Cf. *Ia IIae*, q.68, a.1: “The gifts are perfections of man, whereby he is disposed so as to be amenable to the promptings of God.” Ibid., a.2, 3, 5.
- [1830](#) *Summa*, *Ia IIae*, q.180, a.3 ad 4um.
- [1831](#) Ibid., q.45, a.2; a.5.
- [1832](#) *Summa*, *Ia IIae*, q.111, a.2: “Whether grace is fittingly divided into operating and cooperating grace.”
- [1833](#) John 4: 10.
- [1834](#) 21 Cf. *Ia IIae*, q.180, a.6: “Whether the operation of contemplation is fittingly divided into a threefold movement, circular, straight, and oblique.”
- [1835](#) A close study of what St. Thomas, following Dionysius the Mystic, says of these spiritual movements in *Ia IIae*, q. 180, a.6, will show that they must be conceived in the following manner.

By the straight movement, man contemplates God in the mirror of sensible things or in that of the evangelical parables. The soul rises directly from a particularly expressive sensible fact, such as the parable of the Good Shepherd, to the contemplation of the infinite goodness of God.

By the spiral or oblique movement, the soul contemplates God in the Mirror of intelligible truths or of the mysteries of salvation, with which it is already familiar. By a spiral movement, which recalls the flight of certain birds, it rises from the mysteries of the Incarnation, the redemption, the Eucharist, the life of the Church, to infinite mercy which radiates in them. The Rosary prepares us for this spiral movement, which is also similar to the ascent of a mountain by a winding road.

By the circular movement, the soul contemplates God in Himself in the penumbra of loving faith. Here the soul rises above the multiplicity of sensible images and ideas and, under the inspiration of the Holy Ghost, is united in a holy manner by a loving and sweet knowledge to the hidden God, whose goodness surpasses all our ideas, and even all

the formulas of faith, as the sky includes all the stars which manifest its depths to us.

[1836](#) *The Way of Perfection*, chap. 28.

[1837](#) *The Interior Castle*, fourth mansion, chap. 3.

[1838](#) In this long passage we italicize all that shows that it is an active and not a passive recollection in which the soul recollects itself.

[1839](#) *The Way of Perfection*, chap. 18.

[1840](#) In chapter 29 of *The Way of Perfection*, St. Teresa states clearly the nature of this last acquired prayer and shows that in it there is a disposition to receive infused contemplation: “I advise whoever wishes to acquire this habit (which, as I said, we have the power to gain) not to grow tired in trying gradually to obtain the mastery over herself.... I know that, with His help, if you practice it for a year, or perhaps for only six months, you will gain it. Think what a short time that is for so great an advantage as laying this firm foundation, so that if our Lord wishes to raise you to a high degree of prayer, He will find you prepared for it, since you keep close to Him.”

In chapter 19 of *The Way of Perfection*, speaking of infused contemplation and of the living waters of prayer, St. Teresa enunciates this general principle which she later develops in chapters 20–24, 29, 33: “*Remember, our Lord invited ‘any man’ (‘Come to Me, all you,’ Matt. 11:28) : He is truth itself; His word cannot be doubted. If all had not been included, He would not have addressed everybody, nor would He have said: ‘I will give you to drink.’ He might have said: ‘Let all men come, for they will lose nothing by it, and I will give to drink to those I think fit for it.’ But as He said unconditionally: ‘If any man thirst, let him come to Me,’ I feel sure that, unless they stop halfway, none will fail to drink of this living water.*”

St. Catherine of Siena teaches the same doctrine in her Dialogue, chaps. 53 f.

[1841](#) *The Way of Perfection*, chaps. 30–38.

[1842](#) In *Christian Perfection and Contemplation* (pp. 345–81), we treated at length of this disposition and the general and remote call of interior souls to the infused contemplation of the mysteries of faith. The general and remote call should be distinguished from the individual and proximate call, which may be either sufficient or efficacious.

[1843](#) *The Interior Castle*, fourth mansion, chap. 3.

[1844](#) Ibid.

[1845](#) Simplified affective meditation, especially as it is found in active recollection, described above (*The Way*, chap. 28), has quite often since the seventeenth century been called “acquired contemplation.” We prefer the expression “simplified acquired prayer,” for when the great spiritual writers, especially St. John of the Cross and St. Teresa, speak of contemplation without qualifying it, they always mean infused contemplation, at least initial infused contemplation, although this last may often be preceded by a certain acquired prayer which prepares the soul for it, and which is symbolized by the work of the noria (water wheel) of which St. Teresa speaks (*Life*, chap. 15).

When St. Teresa speaks of “contemplation,” she always means infused contemplation. One may be convinced of this by reading the passages in her works where she begins to use this word; cf. *The Way*, chaps. 18, 19, 20, 21, 25, 27, 31, and *The Interior Castle*, fourth and fifth mansions. It is also evident that St. John of the Cross is speaking of infused contemplation in *The Dark Night*, Bk. I, chaps. 8, 9, 14 ff., and also in *The Ascent of Mount Carmel*, beginning with chaps. 11 and 12 of Book II.

On simplified affective prayer, see also Bossuet’s opusculum: *Maniere courte et facile pour faire l’oraison en foi et de simple presence de Dieu*. The prayer of simplicity described by Bossuet seems to be acquired in its first phase and infused in its second, when the soul receives the special inspiration of the Holy Ghost and when the superhuman mode of the gifts of the Holy Ghost begins to be manifested. Then the soul is rather passive than active; it knows and loves under the special inspiration of the interior Master.

[1846](#) Bk. I, chaps. 8 ff.

[1847](#) Cf. *supra*, chap. 4: “The passive purification of the senses and the entrance into the illuminative way: the three signs of initial infused contemplation under the form of arid quiet before consoled quiet.” Cf. St. Jane de Chantal, *L’Oraison de quietude* (Œuvres diverses, Paris, 1876, II, 268).

[1848](#) Bk. I, chap. 8.

[1849](#) Ibid., chap. 14.

[1850](#) Bk. II, chap. 18.

[1851](#) *Summa*, IIa IIae, q. 180, a. I.

[1852](#) *The Dark Night*, Bk. II, chap. 17.

[1853](#) Bk. III, chap. 31.

[1854](#) Denzinger, *Enchiridion*, nos. 1221–88. Cf. Dudon, S.J., *Michel Molinos*, 1921.

[1855](#) Denzinger, nos. 1275–86.

[1856](#) Ibid., no. 1243.

¹⁸⁵⁷ Ibid., no. 1246.

¹⁸⁵⁸ Ibid., nos. 1275–86.

¹⁸⁵⁹ Cf. Dudon, S.J., Michel Molinos. In this work (pp. 260–61, 267 f.) the author maintains as we do that “there is no contemplation worthy of this name except passive contemplation.... And God, in His common providence, favors with it those who by the heroic generosity of their virtue show themselves worthy of being treated as privileged friends.”

¹⁸⁶⁰ (*OEuvres de Fenelon*, ed. Gosselin, IV, and *Maximes des saints*, new ed. by A. Cherel, 1911.)

¹⁸⁶¹ Denzinger, nos. 1327–49.

¹⁸⁶² Rom 4:18.

¹⁸⁶³ Cf. Cajetan, In Iam Iae, q. 17, a.5. By hope, he says, we desire God for ourselves, but already for God’s sake, in the sense that God is the end of the act of hope and of all the acts of virtue. On the contrary, when we desire something inferior to ourselves, we desire it for ourselves and because of ourselves, *nobis et propter nos*.

¹⁸⁶⁴ Denzinger, nos. 1342, 1347.

¹⁸⁶⁵ Cf. Bossuet, *Maniere courte et facile pour faire l’oraison en foi et de simple presence de Dieu*.

¹⁸⁶⁶ Cf. Denzinger, nos. 1317 ff.

¹⁸⁶⁷ Cf. *OEuvres de Bossuet; Relation sur le quietisme*. The articles of Issy, the result of the conferences held between Bossuet, Noailles, bishop of Chilons, Fenelon, and M. Tronson, 1694–95

¹⁸⁶⁸ Vol. I, pp. 55–135.

¹⁸⁶⁹ Cf. Denzinger, “Errores de amore puro,” Enchiridion, nos. 1328, 1331, 1333, 1336.

¹⁸⁷⁰ Cf. St. Bernard, *Sermons sur le Cantique des Cantiques*, Sermons LXXIX, LXXXIII, VIII. Richard of St. Victor, De quattuor gradibus violentae caritatis, PL, CXCVI, 1213–15, translated into French: *Les Quatre degres de l’amour ardent*, by E. Ledef, Editions of *La Vie spirituelle*.

See also The Imitation, Bk. III, chap. 54 and chap. 5: “Of the wonderful effect of divine love”; St. John of the Cross, *The Dark Night*, Bk. II, chaps. 19, 20; “The ten degrees of divine love according to St. Bernard.”

¹⁸⁷¹ Rom. 9:3.

¹⁸⁷² Cf. Ila Iae, q.27, a.8 ad 1um.

¹⁸⁷³ Rom. 4:18.

¹⁸⁷⁴ Cf. Massoulié, O.P., *Traite de l’amour de Dieu*, Bk. I, chap. 5; Bk. II, chap. I, par. 2; treatise written at the time of quietism. Meynard”O.P., *T raite de la vie interieure* (3rd ed., 1889), I, nos. 221–22, pp. 369–83.

¹⁸⁷⁵ Summa, Ia, q.60, a.5.

¹⁸⁷⁶ St. Thomas speaks in like terms in several places in his works: II Sent., d.3, q.3; III Sent., d.29, q.I, a.3; *In librum Dionysii de div. nominibus*, chap. 4, lect. 9f.; Ia Iae, q.109, a.3; Ila Iae, q.26, a.3: “Whether, out of charity, man is bound to love God more than himself”; Quodlibet, I, q.4, a.3.

¹⁸⁷⁷ Cf. Ia Iae, q. 109, a.3.

¹⁸⁷⁸ Summa, Ila Iae, q.25, a.7: “The wicked know not themselves aright, they do not love themselves aright..., but the good know themselves truly, and therefore truly love themselves.”

¹⁸⁷⁹ Cf. Rom. 4: 18.

¹⁸⁸⁰ Cf. Denzinger, no. 1231: “Qui suum liberum arbitrium Deo donavit de nulla re debet curam habere, nec de inferno, nec de paradiso; nec debet desiderium habere propriae perfectionis, nec virtutum, nec propriae sanctitatis, nec propriae salutis, cuius spem purgare debet.” Ibid., nos. 1344–45.

¹⁸⁸¹ Cf. Cajetan, In Iam Iae, q. 17, a.5, n0.6: “It is one thing to desire this for myself, and another to desire it because of myself.”

¹⁸⁸² St. Thomas thus sums up his teaching (Ila Iae, q.19, a.6): “Whether servile fear remains with charity: Self-love may stand in a threefold relationship to charity. In one way it is contrary to charity, when a man places his end in the love of his own good. In another way it is included in charity, when a man loves himself for the sake of God and in God. In a third way, it is indeed distinct from charity, but is not contrary thereto, as when a man loves himself from the point of view of his own good, yet not so as to place his end in this his own good.”

¹⁸⁸³ Summa, Ia, q. 19, a.11 f.

- [1884](#) *Treatise on the Love of God*, Bk. IX, chap. 4.
- [1885](#) *Discours sur l'acte d'abandon*.
- [1886](#) *Le plus parfait. L'Etat du pur amour*.
- [1887](#) *Abandonment to Divine Providence*.
- [1888](#) *Providence*, Part IV, pp. 215–87.
- [1889](#) St. Thomas, IIa IIae, q.27, a.8 ad 1um and *Comm. in Ep. ad Rom.*, 9:3.
- [1890](#) The appreciative love of God above all else is a love of esteem which is already efficacious, that is, which orders our whole life to Him, but without excluding venial sin. The love by which we love God intensively, more than all else, is an intense impulse of sensible love, a transport of love which makes one anticipate the life of heaven.
- [1891](#) Summa, IIa IIae. q.14. a.8 q. 184. a.3.
- [1892](#) *The Interior Castle*, fourth and fifth mansions.
- [1893](#) *Treatise on the Love of God*, Bk. VI, chaps. 8–12.
- [1894](#) Cf. *Life*, by herself, chaps. 15–19.
- [1895](#) *Ibid.*, chap. 11.
- [1896](#) *Ibid.*, chaps. 14 f.
- [1897](#) *Ibid.*, chaps. 16 f.
- [1898](#) *Ibid.*, chaps. 18 f.
- [1899](#) “Docet enim gradus orationis quot numerantur, veluti totidem superiores in christiana perfectione ascensus esse.”
- [1900](#) The Dark Night, Bk. I, chap. 9.
- [1901](#) *The Way of Perfection*, chap. 31.
- [1902](#) The Interior Castle, fourth mansion, chap. 1.
- [1903](#) *The Way of Perfection*, chap. 31; The Interior Castle, fourth mansion, chap. I.
- [1904](#) *The Way of Perfection*, chaps. 34, 38; *The Interior Castle*, loc. cit.
- [1905](#) *Life*, by herself, chap. 15.
- [1906](#) *Ibid.*, chap. 17.
- [1907](#) Cf. St. Francis de Sales, *Treatise on the Love of God*, Bk. VI, chap. 10.
- [1908](#) *The Interior Castle*, fifth mansion, chap. I.
- [1909](#) *Ibid.*, chap. 2.
- [1910](#) *Life*, chap., 17.
- [1911](#) Fifth mansion, chap. 3. This short cut and the delights found in it are not infused contemplation (which may be arid); it is only the suspension of the imagination and the memory or a beginning of ecstasy, which sometimes accompanies mystical union and greatly facilitates it. Cf. J. Arintero, a.p., *Evolucion mistica*, 2nd ed., p. 667, and *Cuestiones misticas*, 2nd ed., p. 330. Cf. also A. Saudreau, *Degres de la vie spirituelle*, 5th ed., II, 101, no. 2. The short cut is thus the absence of distractions and fatigue, and an abundance of very sensible joy.
- [1912](#) *The Interior Castle*, fifth mansion, chap. 2.
- [1913](#) In *Lettres de Rome sur l'atheisme moderne* (June, 1936, pp. 125 ff.), there was a letter from Spain, dated May 7, 1936, which was written by a young Christian girl who was soundly thrashed as the result of a calumny uttered against her by the Communists. She writes: “How the Lord gives necessary strength to those who pray! I, who am so cowardly, saw death near with a peace which I should never have imagined possible in myself. In spite of the nervous tension of two hours of anguish, I did not lose my serenity, since I was sure of going to heaven immediately after death which awaited us.”

[1914](#) *The Dark Night*, Bk. II, chap. I; *A Spiritual Canticle*, st. 26. There is generally a period of calm between the night of the senses (which corresponds to the beginning of the fourth mansion of St. Teresa) and the night of the spirit (which is indicated in the sixth mansion).

[1915](#) Cf. *infra*, chap. 51.

[1916](#) Matt. 22:1–14.

[1917](#) Ps. 80: 17.

[1918](#) John 6:57.

[1919](#) Cf. III Kings 19:6.

[1920](#) Luke 21: 18.

[1921](#) John 7:37 f.

[1922](#) John 414.

[1923](#) Cf. *supra*, chaps. 22, 27, 28, 29.

[1924](#) *Summa*, IIa IIae, q.180, a. 3, 6.

[1925](#) *The Dark Night*, Bk. II, chap. 18, par. 5.

[1926](#) *Christian Perfection and Contemplation*, pp. 221–35.

[1927](#) *The Interior Castle*, fourth mansion, chap. 3: Description of the prayer of passive recollection in which infused contemplation begins, and which precedes that of quiet in which the will is captivated by God, in spite of involuntary distractions.

[1928](#) Treatise on the Love of God, chaps. 3–7: Differences between meditation and contemplation, which is more simple, more loving, which is truly the fruit of love, “the end and the goal toward which all spiritual exercises tend (*ibid.*, chap. 6).

[1929](#) *Oeuvres complètes* (Paris, 1876), II, 268, opusculé on *L’Oraison de quietude*, and *Reponses de sainte Chantal* (2nd ed.; Paris, 1665), p. 508.

[1930](#) *The Interior Castle*, fourth mansion, chap. 3.

[1931](#) Chap. 28.

[1932](#) Bk. II, chap. 15.

[1933](#) *Summa*, Ia IIae, q.111, a.2: On operating and cooperating grace. Cf. Vol. I, pp. 90–93.

[1934](#) *The Interior Castle*, fourth mansion, chap. 3.

[1935](#) *Christian Perfection and Contemplation*, pp. 215 ff.

[1936](#) *Life*, chap. 12; *The Interior Castle*, fourth mansion, chap. 3. St. John of the Cross, *The Ascent of Mount Carmel*, Bk. II, chap. 15.

[1937](#) *The Way of Perfection*, chap. 28.

[1938](#) Cf. Father Gabriel of St. Magdalen, C.D., “Note sur la contemplation acquise d’après les theologiens du Carmel depuis le XVIIe siècle,” *La Vie Spirituelle*, September, 1923, supplément; reproduced in *Perfection chretienne et contemplation*, II, 745–69.

[1939](#) This is the teaching of Thomas of Jesus, *De contemplatione*, Bk. I, chaps. 7 f; Bk. II, chap. 5; of Philip of the Blessed Trinity, *Summa theol. myst.* (ed. 1874), II, 299; III, 43; of Anthony of the Holy Ghost, *Directorium mysticum* (ed. 1733), tr. III, d.III, sect. IV; tr. IV, d.I, sect. VI; of Joseph of the Holy Ghost, *Cursus theol. mystico-scol.*, disp. XI, q. 2, nos. 18, 23; and of the Dominican Vallgornera, *Theol. myst. S. Thomae*, q.3, d. 3, a.3.

[1940](#) Cf. *The Dark Night*, Bk. I, chap. 14; cf. also chap. 8.

[1941](#) At the end of his study on Molinos, *Le Quietisme espagnol, Michel de Molinos* (1921, p. 260), Father Dudon, S.J., concludes as follows: “There is no contemplation worthy of this name except passive contemplation.” On the contrary, Molinos admitted a contemplation acquired by the suppression of our activity; it became somnolence.

[1942](#) *The Dark Night*, Bk. II, chap. 18.

[1943](#) *Summa*, Ia IIae, q.68, a. I.

[1944](#) Bk. II, chap. 17.

[1945](#) Summa, Ia IIae, q.68, a. I.

[1946](#) Father de Guibert, S.J., in his *Theologia spiritualis ascetica et mystica* (1937, p. 344), says on the subject of the specific distinction between infused contemplation and the acquired prayers: “Quae speciei diversitas a non paucis prorsus negatur, ut v.g. a P. Garrigou-Lagrange.” We, on the contrary, have always admitted with St. Thomas and his disciples a specific difference between the infused virtues and the gifts, and consequently between the act of the virtues which proceeds *ex industria propria* (even with the latent help of the gifts) and the characteristic act of the gifts, which proceeds from a special inspiration of the Holy Ghost.

[1947](#) Cf. Louis Lallemant, S.J., *La Doctrine spirituelle*, 4th Principle, chap. 3, a.3.

[1948](#) Summa, IIa IIae, q.8, a.3; q.45, a. 3.

[1949](#) *Coll.*, IX, 31.

[1950](#) *The Interior Castle*, fifth mansion, chap. I: The saint speaks here of certain unusual particularities which are found in this fifth mansion and which are the portion of the small number of souls that are in it. Likewise, cf. fifth mansion, chap. 3, apropos of “the short cut.” Cf. supra, the preceding chapter for notes relative to simple union.

[1951](#) *The Interior Castle*, seventh mansion, chap. 3.

[1952](#) *Life*, chaps. 11, 14, 15, 16, 18.

[1953](#) *Life*, chap. 19, fourth water.

[1954](#) *The Dark Night*, Bk. I, chap. 14.

[1955](#) *Ibid.*, Bk. II, chaps. 12–21.

[1956](#) We showed this at length in *Perfection chretienne et contemplation*, 11, appen., pp. [1]-[44].

[1957](#) Summa, Ia IIae, q. 111, a.5.

[1958](#) *Christian Perfection and Contemplation*, pp. 264–71. See also St. Teresa, *Life*, chap. 17.

[1959](#) See also Summa, IIa IIae, q.97, a.2 ad 2um.

[1960](#) In his *Theologia spiritualis* (p. 353), Father de Guibert maintains that infused contemplation implies essentially a direct and immediate intuition of the supernatural gifts which unite us to God. We do not think so. Either, in fact, this intuition is immediate, or it is mediate by the effects of grace in us.

If there is immediate intuition of the supernatural gifts of grace and of the infused virtues, it is an extraordinary favor, as when Blessed Angela of Foligno saw her soul, or as when certain contemplatives are placed in a state similar to that of the separated soul, which knows itself immediately. And then this extraordinary favor, which seems to require an infused idea, is not necessary to infused contemplation, properly so called, for infused contemplation endures in the passive night of the spirit, in which the soul has by no means this immediate intuition of grace in itself, since it feels separated from God and suffers greatly as a result. If there is only mediate intuition through the effects of grace in us, then this does not exceed the act of the gift of wisdom as the Thomists have always understood it, as we have just said.

Finally, St. John of the Cross, in defining contemplation as “an infused, loving knowledge of God” (*The Dark Night*, Bk. II, chap. 18), does not speak of immediate intuition of the supernatural gifts of grace and of the infused virtues, an intuition which, moreover, would give us absolute certitude of the state of grace even before reaching the transforming union.

[1961](#) It is understandable, however, that, in order to define the mystical state, some authors have considered chiefly what it is in its full development, with the experiential and often sweet knowledge of the presence of God in us. Anyone would fall into the opposite extreme if he talked about an active mystical life in which the gifts of action would no longer be directed by the intellectual gifts of wisdom, understanding, knowledge, and counsel. What must be said is that in certain mystics the intellectual gifts appear chiefly under a practical form, directed toward action, as in St. Vincent de Paul, whereas in others these same intellectual gifts are manifested under a clearly contemplative form, as in St. John of the Cross.

[1962](#) We treated this question at length in *Christian Perfection and Contemplation*, pp. 337–95.

[1963](#) *The Dark Night*, Bk. I, chap. 14.

[1964](#) This point of doctrine does not permit us to accept what Father de Guibert says in his recent *Theologia spiritualis*: “*Possunt animae ad quemlibet sanctitatis gradum ascendere, quin hac via (contemplationis infusae) habituali modo incedant.*” We believe that this proposition does not preserve the teaching of the great spiritual writers, notably of St. John of the Cross, on the subject of the passive purifications, properly so called, necessary to reach a high perfection. These passive purifications are, in fact, a characterized mystical state, especially that of the spirit, which corresponds to the beginning of St. Teresa’s sixth mansion. Without these passive purifications and the infused contemplation which they imply, one could not reach the perfection of the transforming union. Such is manifestly the teaching of St. John of the Cross; to doubt it, one would have had to forget the most categorical affirmations which recur continually in his works.

[1965](#) In *Christian Perfection and Contemplation* (pp. 369–71), we quoted several texts from St. John of the Cross relative to this teaching: *The Dark Night*, Bk. I, chaps. I, 14; Bk. II, chap. I; *The Ascent of Mount Carmel*, Bk. II, chap. 13; Bk. III, chap. I; *The Living Flame*, st. III, v. 3. Cf. also St. Teresa: *The Way of Perfection*, chaps. 19, 20, 21, 23, 25, 29, 33; *The Interior Castle*, fifth mansion, chap. I.

We need only recall here that St. John of the Cross says in *The Ascent of Mount Carmel* (Bk. II, chap. 15): “The soul, when it shall have purified and emptied itself from all these intelligible forms and images, will then dwell in this pure and simple light, transformed thereto in the state of perfection. This light is ever ready to be communicated to the soul, but does not flow in, because of the forms and veils of the creature which enfold and embarrass the soul” But in *The Dark Night* (Bk. I, chap. I), he adds: “Souls begin to enter the dark night... the state of contemplatives, that, having passed through it, they may arrive at the state of the perfect.” Finally, full perfection is found only in the transforming union, in which “the soul is no longer molested, either by the devil, or the flesh, or the world, or the desires, seeing that here is fulfilled what is written in the Canticle: ‘Winter is now past, the rain is over and gone. The flowers have appeared in our land’” (*A Spiritual Canticle of the Soul*, Part III, st. 12).

St. Teresa speaks in like terms to her daughters at the beginning of the fifth mansion, chap. I: “All we who wear the holy habit of the Carmelites are called to prayer and contemplation. This was the object of our Order, to this lineage we belong.... How little do most of us care to prepare our souls that our Lord may reveal this jewel to us... to gain which we should neglect no means, either small or great!” In *The Way of Perfection* (chap. 19), speaking of infused contemplation and of the living waters of prayer, St. Teresa enunciates this general principle, which she later develops in chapters 20, 21, 23, 25, 29,33: “Remember, our Lord invited ‘any man’: He is truth itself.... If all had not been included, He would not have addressed everybody, nor would He have said: ‘I will give you to drink.’... But as He said unconditionally: ‘If any man thirst let him come to Me,’ I feel sure that, unless they stop half-way, none will fail to drink of this living water.”

¹⁹⁶⁶ St. Teresa says in *The Way of Perfection* (chap. 10): “The last chapter (on the general call) seems to contradict what I said, when in order to console those who were not contemplatives I told them that God had made many ways of reaching Him, just as He has made ‘many mansions.’ I repeat that His Majesty, being God, knows our weakness and has provided for us.” And, in fact, she maintains the principle of the general call, which she again explains: “His mercy is so great that He hinders no one from drinking of the fountain of life.... Indeed, He calls us loudly and publicly to do so (‘Jesus stood and cried, saying: If any man thirst, let him come to Me, and drink,’ John 7: 37). Then take my advice; do not loiter on the road, but struggle manfully until you perish in the attempt.”

The restrictions made earlier (chap. 17) by St. Teresa did not, therefore, concern the remote general call, but the individual proximate call, which is generally heard only by very generous souls.

St. Catherine of Siena speaks in exactly the same terms in chapter 53 of her *Dialogue*, apropos of the same text of St. John: “If any man thirst, let him come to Me, and drink.” The same teaching is found in Blessed Henry Suso’s *Book of Eternal Wisdom*, chap. 21.

With this same meaning we must understand the reservations made at times by St. John of the Cross, for example, when he says in *The Dark Night* (Bk. I, chap. 9): “God does not raise to perfect contemplation everyone that is tried in the way of the spirit, and He alone knoweth why.” The saint explains his thought on the subject at greater length in *The Living Flame* (St. 2, v. 5), where he says: “It is because many souls refuse to bear ever so little dryness and mortification, instead of acting with full patience. Then God does not continue to purify them profoundly.” In other words: “Many are called, but few chosen.” His reservations bear not only on the general and remote call, but on the individual and proximate call, which many do not prepare themselves to hear.

¹⁹⁶⁷ Bk. I, chap. 9.

¹⁹⁶⁸ *The Interior Castle*, fifth mansion, chap. I. St. John of the Cross, *The Dark Night*, Bk. I, chap. 9.

¹⁹⁶⁹ Wisd. 7:7–14.

¹⁹⁷⁰ *Summa theol. myst.* (ed. 1874), II, 299; III, 43. Anthony of the Holy Ghost and Vallgornera later speak in exactly the same terms. Philip of the Blessed Trinity has been greatly copied, but he himself found this teaching in the Carmelite, John of Jesus Mary, whose works he extensively utilized, and in Alvarez de Paz, S.J., *De inquisitione pacis*, ed. 1617, Bk. I, Part 3, chap. 27. Alvarez de Paz was also very much utilized by several authors who did not even mention his name.

¹⁹⁷¹ *Cursus theol. myst. scol.*, Vol. II, II Praed., disp. XI, q.2, nos. 18, 23.

¹⁹⁷² *The Dark Night*, Bk. I, chap. 9.

¹⁹⁷³ Notably the issue for May, 1931, suppl., pp. [67]-[75], containing the conclusion of this inquiry.

¹⁹⁷⁴ Nouvelle Revue Theol., February, 1929, p. 182, quoted by Canon A. Saudreau in the article: “Pour fixer la terminologie mystique et pour obtenir une entente,” *La Vie spirituelle*, June, 1929, suppl., p. [146].

¹⁹⁷⁵ *De inquisitione pacis* (ed. 1617), Bk. I, Part III, chap. 27.

¹⁹⁷⁶ *Treatise on the Love of God*, Bk. VI, chap. 6.

¹⁹⁷⁷ Bk. III, chap. 31.

¹⁹⁷⁸ Apoc. 2: 17.

¹⁹⁷⁹ Occasionally the title “acquired contemplation” has been applied to what is initial infused contemplation, because in it consideration has been given chiefly to the work of the spirit (symbolized by that of the noria), which prepares the soul to receive the special inspiration of the Holy Ghost. But it is fitting to denominate an act or a state by considering in it, not what is material as a preliminary disposition, but what is formal and new. Then the very nature of the act to be defined is expressed. Therefore it is better in this case to speak of initial infused contemplation, which begins with the passive night of the senses. This is the way that St. John of the Cross speaks when, after describing this purification, he says (*The Dark Night*, Bk. I, chap. 14): “The soul began to set out on the way of the spirit, the way of proficients, which is also called the illuminative way, or the way of infused contemplation, wherein God Himself teaches and refreshes the soul without meditation or any active efforts that itself may deliberately make.”

¹⁹⁸⁰ On the subject of mystical contemplation we read in the *Revue d’ascetique et de mystique* (April, 1936, p. 175): “It is the experience of a new presence of God.... This knowledge is so evidently new that all contemplatives are at first wonderstruck by its beauty, grandeur, and sweetness. If uneasiness soon begins to develop in the soul that fears illusion, it is never experienced in the very act itself of this contact with God which brings with it certitude and peace. It is no longer a question here of

greater or less differences in what has been experienced up to this point; the experience is completely distinct from all that has been felt up to this moment.” V. Lithard, C.S.Sp.

The author adds: “The theory of Canon Saudreau and of Father Garrigou Lagrange seems insufficient here; this grace is not only eminent; it is, without being extraordinary, of a different nature.”

Do inspiration and special illumination, received with docility through the gifts of understanding and wisdom, no longer suffice here, contrary to the teaching of so many great masters on these gifts and on infused prayer? The author seems to say so; nevertheless, according to him, there is no need of the angelic species, which, he says, was explicitly rejected by St. Thomas (*De veritate*, q. 18, a. 1); but he has recourse to the light of grace of which St. Thomas speaks in connection with the mystical knowledge Adam had while still innocent: “By a certain spiritual light and a divine influx into the mind of man, which was like an expressed similitude of uncreated light, he saw God” (*De veritate*, q. 18, a. 1); “By this mode he [Adam in his innocence] knew God not from visible creatures, but from a certain spiritual similitude impressed on his mind” (*ibid.*, a.2). St. Thomas says in the same reference, two lines above: “From the perfection of grace, man in the state of innocence had the power to know God through interior inspiration from the radiation of divine wisdom.”

It remains to be known in what this interior inspiration differs from the more or less elevated special inspiration which the gifts of understanding and wisdom dispose us to receive. This special inspiration of the gifts of understanding and wisdom is not made by means of sensible things (such as preaching), but is purely spiritual and is above discourse or reasoning. It will be difficult, therefore, to show that between it and the light of grace, which Adam had in his innocence, there is a difference not only of degree, but of nature. Moreover, in this same question 18 of *De veritate* (a. 1 ad 4um). St. Thomas says with regard to Adam in his innocence: “In contemplation God is seen through a medium, which is the light of wisdom elevating the mind to discern divine things” (it is the light of the gift of wisdom). And St. Thomas adds: “And thus by grace God is seen by the contemplative after the state of sin, although more perfectly in the state of innocence.” This text is important.

¹⁹⁸¹ The Interior Castle, fourth mansion, chap. 2.

¹⁹⁸² *Ibid.*, chap. I; *The Way of Perfection*, chap. 31.

¹⁹⁸³ *The Interior Castle*, fifth mansion, chaps. I f.

¹⁹⁸⁴ *Life*, by herself, chaps. 14, 18.

¹⁹⁸⁵ Bk. I, chap. 9.

¹⁹⁸⁶ *Reponses* (2nd ed.; Paris, 1665), pp. 508 ff.

¹⁹⁸⁷ Bossuet says at the end of this admirable opuscul: “After the purgation of the soul by the purgatory of sufferings, through which it must necessarily pass, will come illumination, repose, joy, through intimate union with God, who will render this world, exile though it be, like a paradise for the soul.”

Frequent meditation on this little work of Bossuet, will show that it differs notably from what he had said in *Instructions sur les etats d’oraison* (no. 22), where he applied the name “extraordinary” to the prayers of simple presence of God, of surrender, and of quiet, and likewise from what he had said also in his work, *Mystici in tutu* (no. 41): “St. Francis de Sales reached the summit of perfection without having gone beyond discursive meditation.” St. Jane de Chantal says the contrary in her *Responses* (2nd ed.; Paris, 1665), pp. 508 ff.

In the opuscul of which we are speaking, Bossuet says of the prayer of simplicity that “the soul, through its fidelity in mortifying and recollecting itself, ordinarily receives it.” The second phase of this prayer is infused: “Therefore leaving reasoning, the soul makes use of a sweet contemplation, which holds it peaceful, attentive, susceptible to the divine operations and impressions which the Holy Ghost communicates to it. It does little and receives much.... The less the creature works, the more powerfully God operates.... The divine influences enrich the soul with all sorts of virtues.

¹⁹⁸⁸ Cf. *Note sur la contemplation acquie chez les theologiens du Carmel*, by Father Gabriel of St. Magdalen, CD., reproduced in our book, *Perfection chretienne et contemplation*, II, 745–68.

¹⁹⁸⁹ *Summa*, Ia IIae, q.68, a. 1: “Man needs yet higher perfections whereby to be disposed to be moved by God.” The *inspiratio specialis* is not only *motio quoad exercitium*, but also *regulatio* superior to that of reason enlightened by faith.

¹⁹⁹⁰ *Summa*, Ia IIae, q.III, a.2: “In that effect in which our mind is moved and does not move, but in which God is the sole mover, the operation is attributed to God, and it is with reference to this that we speak of operating grace. But in that effect in which our mind both moves and is moved, the operation is not only attributed to God, but also to the soul; and it is with reference to this that we speak of cooperating grace.”

In *Christian Perfection and Contemplation* (pp. 290–94), we explained this difference at length. See also *ibid.*, pp. 272–77, on the specific distinction between the gifts and even the infused virtues, a distinction based on their formal motive. Their formal motive is the special inspiration of the Holy Ghost, which is the immediate rule of the act of the gifts; it is a superhuman direction which has as a consequence a superhuman mode of acting. This is evident when it is a question of the act of the gift of counsel, superior to the act of infused prudence. This is also the case in the inspiration of the gifts of understanding and wisdom, which leads to an act of penetrating and sweet faith (called an infused act), notably different from the act of faith to which we generally move ourselves by discursive deliberation with the help of cooperating grace.

¹⁹⁹¹ *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, 8: 15 f.

¹⁹⁹² Luke 24: 32.

¹⁹⁹³ Rom. 8:26.

¹⁹⁹⁴ *Summa*, IIa IIae, q.45, a. 1, 2. Article 1 speaks of special inspiration, and Article 2 deals with the connaturalness which special inspiration employs to manifest to us how greatly the mysteries of faith correspond to our highest aspirations.

1995 *Summa*, Ia IIae, q. III, a. 2. Ct. supra, I, 91–93.

1996 *Summa*, Ia IIae, q. 68, a. 1, 2, 3.

1997 *Life*, chaps. 15–19.

1998 Cf. *Perfection chretienne et contemplation*, II, first appendix, pp. [1][44] and p. [87]. Does mystical contemplation require infused ideas? The texts from the works of St. Thomas and those of St. John of the Cross enable us to reply in the negative.

1999 *De veritate*, q. 18, a. 1 ad 4. Cf. also, IIa IIae, q. 5, a. 1 ad 1 um; Ia, q. 94, a. 1 ad 3 um.

Section 5

[2000](#) *Summa*, Ia IIae, q. III, a. 5: “Sanctifying grace is nobler than *gratia gratis data*.” Therefore if mystical contemplation, properly so called, depended on prophetic light or any other *gratia gratis data*, since the latter is inferior to the grace of the virtues and gifts, it might happen that a great contemplative was not a mystic and a person only meagerly endowed with contemplation was very mystical, for the first would have the gifts in a very high degree, but without prophetic light, and the second would have this light without a high degree of the gifts.

[2001](#) *The Dark Night*, Bk. I, chaps. 8, 9, 14.

[2002](#) *The Interior Castle*, fourth mansion.

[2003](#) Cf. St. Thomas, *Comm. in Ep. ad Rom.*, 8: 16.

[2004](#) October I, 1933. Cf. *supra*, I, 78–82.

[2005](#) The seven gifts cannot be specified, as Father Lithard would wish, by simple receptivity, independently of the formal object of their acts. Were this true, two gifts would suffice, one in the intellect and the other in the will, to enable these faculties to receive the divine impulsion. As a matter of fact, there are seven specifically distinct gifts.

[2006](#) *Perfection chretienne et contemplation*, 7th ed., II, [1]–[51].

[2007](#) *La Vie spirituelle*, November, 1936, pp. [203]ff.

[2008](#) Q.18,a.1 ad 4um.

[2009](#) Cf. Ia IIae, q.45.

[2010](#) Cf. St. Thomas, *In Ep. ad Rom.*, 8: 16: “The Spirit Himself giveth testimony to our spirit that we are the sons of God by the effect of filial love which He produces in us.” The texts of St. Thomas relative to the quasiexperiential knowledge of God through the gift of wisdom have been assembled several times; we did so in *The Love of God and the Cross of Jesus*, I, 140–73, when treating this question *ex professo*.

[2011](#) Ps. 33:9.

[2012](#) *The Dark Night*, Bk. II, chap. 18.

[2013](#) Cf. pp. 241 ff.; 250–60; 368 ff.; 379 fl.; 446.

[2014](#) *Christian Perfection and Contemplation*, pp. 250 f.

[2015](#) *The Interior Castle*, fifth mansion, chap. I.

[2016](#) *Ibid.*, seventh mansion, chap. 3.

[2017](#) Cf. *La Doctrine spirituelle*, seventh principle, chap. 6, a.7.

[2018](#) *The Way of Perfection*, chap. 31; *The Interior Castle*, fourth mansion, chap. I.

[2019](#) *The Way of Perfection*, chaps. 24, 28; *The Interior Castle*, fourth mansion, chap. I.

[2020](#) *Reponses de sainte Jeanne de Chantal* (2nd ed.; Paris, 1665), p. 508; (*Oeuvres diverses* (Paris, 1876), II, 268, the opusculé on *l’Oraison de quietude*.

[2021](#) *Life*, chap. 17.

[2022](#) *Ibid.*

[2023](#) *The Interior Castle*, fifth mansion, chap. 3.

[2024](#) *Evolucion mistica* (2nd ed.), pp. 667 fl.; *Cuestiones misticas* (2nd ed.), pp. 330 ff.

[2025](#) *Razon Y Fe*, July, 1908, pp. 325 ff.

[2026](#) *Degres de la vie spirituelle* (5th ed.), II, 101, no. 2; *L’Etat mystique* (2nd ed., nos. 40, 116.

[2027](#) Cf. chaps. 18–21.

- [2028](#) Cf. also her *Life*, chap. 17; *The Foundations*, chap. 4.
- [2029](#) Cf. p. 191.
- [2030](#) Ibid., p. 187.
- [2031](#) On IIa IIae, q.45, a. I.
- [2032](#) *Cursus theol. scol. mysticae* (old ed.), Vol. II, dist. 13, p. 395.
- [2033](#) We treated this question in *Christian Perfection and Contemplation*, pp. 330 f.
- [2034](#) *La Structure de l'ame et l'experience mystique* (1917), II, 171, on the expression: "Faith enlightened by the gifts."
- [2035](#) *Traduction nouvelle des oeuvres de saint Jean de la Croix*, Vol. III, appendix 5, p. 485.
- [2036](#) Cf. Vol. II, append., p. [42].
- [2037](#) *Traduction nouvelle*, Vol. III, appendix 5, p. 497.
- [2038](#) Cf. *Life*, chap. 14.
- [2039](#) *Perfection chretienne et contemplation*, Vol. II, pp. [4I]-[43J].
- [2040](#) On what belongs to the normal way of sanctity according to St. John of the Cross, we are happy to point out the collection of four lectures given in Rome in March, 1936, by Father Gabriel of St. Magdalen, CD., under the title: *San Giovanni della Croce, Dottore dell'Amore divino*, Florence, 1936.
- [2041](#) Cf. *supra*, I, 14.
- [2042](#) Acts 2 f. We discussed the second and third conversions at greater length in a little book, which appeared in 1932, entitled *Les Trois conversions et les trois voies*.
- [2043](#) *Summa*, Ia IIae, q. 111, a. 5: "The end is always greater than the means. But sanctifying grace ordains a man immediately to a union with his last end, whereas *gratia gratis data* ordains a man to what is preparatory to the end; i.e. by prophecy and miracles and so forth, men are induced to unite themselves to their last end. And hence sanctifying grace is nobler than *gratia gratis data*."
- [2044](#) John 15:1,5,7.
- [2045](#) Job 7: 1.
- [2046](#) Ecclus.27:5f.
- [2047](#) Ecclus. 2:5.
- [2048](#) Lam. I: 13.
- [2049](#) Luke 22:31.
- [2050](#) *De quantitate animae*, chap. 33.
- [2051](#) Morales, Bk. XXIV, chap. 6, no. 11; Bk. X, chap. 10, no. 17.
- [2052](#) PG, XC, 1215.
- [2053](#) *Hom.I in Eccli.*, I.
- [2054](#) *Le Livre de la plus haute verite*, chap. 7; *Les Sept degres*, chaps. 11, 13 f.
- [2055](#) *Sermon pour le lundi avant les Rameaux; ler Sermon pour la Pentecote*, trad. Hugueny, I, 257–69; II, 28, 209, 211, 245,
- [2056](#) *The Dark Night*, Bk. II, chaps. 7 f. Cf. also St. Teresa, *The Interior Castle*, sixth mansion, chap. I; Blessed Angela of Foligno, *Livre des visions et instructions*, chaps. 6, 7, 9, 26.
- [2057](#) *The Dark Night*, Bk. II, chap. 2.
- [2058](#) Ibid.
- [2059](#) Ibid.

[2060](#) Cf. I Cor. 13:11.

[2061](#) *The Dark Night*, Bk. II, chap. 3.

[2062](#) Cf. *Sermon pour le samedi avant la vigile des Rameaux* (trans. Hugueny) I, 249.

[2063](#) Ibid., pp. 249 f.

[2064](#) Ibid., p. 253.

[2065](#) Ibid., p. 252.

[2066](#) That is, as the translator points out, with or without the desire of your lower nature, which does not always thirst for God.

[2067](#) Ibid., p.254.

[2068](#) Summa, Ia IIae, q. 112, a. I: “For it is as necessary that God alone should deify, bestowing a partaking of the divine nature by a participated likeness, as it is impossible that anything save fire should enkindle.”

[2069](#) Cf. supra, I, 299–322.

[2070](#) The progress of the knowledge and love of God, which characterizes this purification, is precisely what distinguishes it from sufferings that, in certain respects, resemble it, like those of neurasthenia. These latter may have nothing purifying about them, but they may also be borne for love of God and in a spirit of abandonment.

Likewise sufferings which are the result of a person’s lack of virtue, of an undisciplined and at times exasperated sensibility, are not of themselves purifying, although a person may also accept them as a salutary humiliation, the result of his sins, and as a means of making reparation for them.

[2071](#) *The Dark Night*, Bk. II, chap. 3.

[2072](#) Ibid., chap. 4.

[2073](#) John 16:7.

[2074](#) Acts 3: 15.

[2075](#) Acts 4: 11 f.

[2076](#) *Le Livre de ses visions et instructions*, chap. 19.

[2077](#) Ibid., chap. 20.

[2078](#) Ibid.

[2079](#) Lettres, I, 153. Cf. also Father Cajetan of the Holy Name of Mary, *Oraison et ascension mystique de saint Paul de la Croix* (Louvain, 1930) chap, 3, pp. 115, 175. “Forty-five years of desolation: apparent disappearance of the virtues of faith, hope, and charity. The saint believes himself abandoned by God. Patience and resignation to the will of God. The saint is drawn into the wounds of Jesus. Jesus on the cross says to him: ‘You are in My heart.’ The Passion is imprinted on his heart, and he is held for three hours in the side of Jesus.”

St. Paul of the Cross not only traversed a tunnel, but he dug it in order to cause the religious of his Order to pass through it in their turn.

[2080](#) *In Eccli.*, Hom. I.

[2081](#) Cf. Tauler, Second Sermon for Pentecost. See also the Sermon for the Fifth Sunday after Trinity Sunday, where he says: “Then there opens up a very deserted road, which is wholly somber and solitary. On this road God takes back all that He has given. Man is then so completely abandoned to himself that he no longer knows anything of God. He reaches a state of such anguish that he no longer knows whether he is on the right road... and this becomes so painful to him that this vast world seems too narrow to him. He has no longer any feeling of his God, he no longer knows anything about Him, and everything else displeases him. It is as if he were fastened between two walls, with a sword behind him and a sharp lance in front of him. Let him then sit down and say: ‘Hail, O God, bitter bitterness full of all graces.’ To love to excess and to be deprived of the good that one loves seems to him more painful trial than hell, if hell were possible on earth. All that one can then say to this man consoles him as much as would a stone. Less than anything else, he does not wish anyone to talk to him about creatures.... Take courage! The Lord is surely very near. Rest on the trunk of a very living true faith: soon all will go exceedingly well.” This is the night and the profound emptiness which prepare the true deification of the soul. Elsewhere Tauler compares this state to that of a ship which has lost its sails and masts in a storm.

[2082](#) Cf. Abelly, *Vie de saint Vincent de Paul*, Bk. III, chap. 11, sect. I, pp. 164–68. Cf. *Revue d’ascétique et de mystique*, 1931, pp. 398 ff.

[2083](#) *The Dark Night*, Bk. II, chap. 5.

[2084](#) Wisd. 3:6.

[2085](#) Deut. 4: 24.

[2086](#) Lam. 1:13.

[2087](#) Ps.18:13.

[2088](#) Ps. 38:6.

[2089](#) Ps.17:29.

[2090](#) Ps. 50: 12.

[2091](#) John 8:31 f.

[2092](#) *The Dark Night*, Bk. II, chap. 5.

[2093](#) *In Eccli.*, Hom. 1.

[2094](#) It is clearly a question here, as we see, of what prepares the soul to enter the unitive way.

[2095](#) *The Dark Night*, Bk. II, chap. 10.

[2096](#) *Ibid.*, chap. 6.

[2097](#) *Ibid.*, chap. 9.

[2098](#) *Summa*, IIa IIae, q.8, a.1.

[2099](#) *Ibid.*, ad 2um.

[2100](#) *Summa*, IIa IIae, q.8, a.2: “We know that whatever be the outward appearances, they do not contradict the truth.” Cf. *ibid.*, a.8.

[2101](#) *The Interior Castle*, fourth mansion, chap. 2.

[2102](#) *Summa*, IIa IIae, q.8, a.2.

[2103](#) Cf. I Cor. 2: 10: “The Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God.”

[2104](#) Phil. 2:7 f.

[2105](#) *Summa*, IIa IIae, q.8, a.3.

[2106](#) *Ibid.*, ad 2um.

[2107](#) *Ibid.*, a.8 ad 1um.

[2108](#) *Ibid.*, a.8.

[2109](#) *Summa*, Ia, q.13, a.1: “God can be named by us from creatures, nevertheless not so as to express by the name what belongs to the divine Essence in Itself.” Cf. Cajetan, on Ia, q. 39, a. I, no. 7: “The Deity is before all in its being and in all its attributes, for it is above being and above unity, etc.” Being and unity, like understanding and love, are naturally capable of being shared; it is thus that we can naturally know these divine perfections. The Deity as such can only be shared in supernaturally by sanctifying grace, which is defined as a participation in the Deity or the divine nature.”

[2110](#) *Le Livre des visions et des instructions*, chap. 26: “I see nothing and I see all; the more this infinite good is seen in the darkness, the more certain it is that it exceeds all.”

[2111](#) Cf. I Tim. 6:16.

[2112](#) *Summa*, IIa IIae, q.8, a.8.

[2113](#) *Ibid.*, q.9, a.4 ad 1um: “To the gift of knowledge there corresponds sorrow for past errors.” The gift of knowledge, says St. Augustine, corresponds to the beatitude of the tears of contrition, for it shows the emptiness of creatures and the gravity of sin which turns us away from God.

[2114](#) *Summa*, IIa IIae, q.45, a.2, 6.

[2115](#) There is here a painful presence of God.

[2116](#) On the description and explanation of the night of the spirit, cf. *Etudes carmelitaines*, October, 1938: Louis of the Trinity, C.D., “L’obscurité nuit du feu d’amour,” pp. 7–32; H. C. Puech, “La ténacité mystique chez le Pseudo-Denys et dans la tradition patristique,” pp. 33–53; G. Thery, O.P., “Denys au Moyen-Age, l’aube de la *Nuit obscure*,” pp. 68–74; L. Reypens, S.J., “La nuit de l’esprit chez Ruysbroec,” pp. 75–81; B. M. Lavaud, O.P., “L’angoisse spirituelle selon Jean Tauler,” pp. 82–91; Father Debonnie, C.S.S.R., “Le Purgatoire de Catherine de Genes,” pp. 91–101; J. Maritain, “L’expérience mystique naturelle et le vide,” pp. 116–39; Lucian Mary of St. Joseph, C.D., “A la recherche d’une structure essentielle de la Nuit de l’esprit,” pp. 254–81.

[2117](#) *The Dark Night*, Bk. II, chap. 5.

[2118](#) In his *Treatise on the Love of God* (Bk. II, chap. I), St. Francis de Sales says on this subject: “When the rising sun is red..., or when the setting sun is wan, pale, gray, we say that it is a sign of rain. Theotime, the sun is neither red, nor black, nor pale, nor gray, nor green. This great luminary is not at all subject to these vicissitudes and changes of color, having for its sole color only its very clear and perpetual light.... But we speak in this way because it seems so to us, according to the variety of the vapors which are between it and our eyes, which make it appear in different manners. Now we discourse thus of God: not so much according to what He is in Himself, as according to His works by the mediation of which we contemplate Him.... There is in God only one perfection, which comprises all the others in an infinitely excellent and eminent manner which our spirit cannot think of.”

[2119](#) Cf. I Tim. 6: 16.

[2120](#) He said that divine things are so much the more obscure for us as they of themselves are more intelligible and luminous, because they are the farthest removed from the senses. Cf. *Metaph.*, Bk. II, chap. I. In reality, this affirmation, “the sun exists,” is clearer for us than the statement, “God exists.” Nevertheless, of Himself, God alone is subsistent Being, and alone is He who is, and the light of the sun is only a shadow compared with the divine light.

Time seems clearer to us than eternity, and yet the fleeting instant of itself is far less intelligible than the immutable instant, the single instant of immobile eternity.

[2121](#) For example, they can hardly dwell on Molina’s conception.

[2122](#) The dark hours of Christ’s passion enlighten the saints. Likewise, as St. John of the Cross points out (*The Dark Night*, Bk. II, chap. 8): “The ray of high contemplation, transcending as it does the natural powers, striking the soul with its divine light, makes it dark, and deprives it of all the natural affections and apprehensions which it previously entertained in its own natural light.” Thus the lower part of the soul is darkened, while the higher part is gradually illumined and “the spiritual light, which beats on the soul is of itself neither visible nor perceptible because it is so clear; but when it beats upon anything that reflects it, that is, upon any matter of perfection which presents itself to the understanding or a decision to be made as to the truth or falsehood of anything, the soul sees it at once, and understands the matter more clearly than it ever did before it entered into this darkness (ibid).

We knew a contemplative lay sister who had no human culture whatsoever, but who was very spiritual as a result of interior trials; she was as if consumed. She had found two great friends among the saints: St. Thomas Aquinas and St. Albert the Great. She, who had absolutely no philosophical or theological training, loved to read how these great saints prayed and she often directed her prayers to them saying: “They are great doctors of the Church, they enlighten souls that ask them to do so.” As a matter of fact, St. Thomas showed her where the dark tunnel through which she was passing was to lead her. We have frequently observed that St. Thomas has often thus enlightened tried souls that call upon him.

[2123](#) John 1: 5.

[2124](#) In *The Dark Night* (Bk. II, chap. 5), St. John of the Cross says on this subject: “The soul, by reason of its impurity, suffers exceedingly when the divine light shines upon it. And when the rays of this pure light strike upon the soul, in order to expel its impurities, the soul perceives itself to be so unclean and miserable that it seems as if God had set Himself against it, and itself were set against God.”

[2125](#) Cf. *The Dark Night*, Bk. II, chaps. 5 f.

[2126](#) Ibid., chap. 7.

[2127](#) *L’Abandon a la Providence divine*, abridged ed., Bk. III, chap. 3; complete ed., Bk. II, chap. 4, par. 2.

[2128](#) Cf. I Kings 2:6 j; Deut. 32:39; Tob. 13:12; Wisd. 16:13.

[2129](#) Cf. II Cor. 6: 10.

[2130](#) *The Dark Night*, Bk. II, chap. 12.

[2131](#) Summa, IIa IIae, q. 180, a.6. In this article St. Thomas alludes to this matter when he explains how the spirit rises from the straight movement of contemplation (which starts with sensible things) to the oblique movement, then to the circular movement, similar to that of the eagle which, high up in the sky, describes a circle several times while contemplating the sun and the horizon. He says (ad 2um): “But on the part of the soul, where it arrive at this uniformity (in which it contemplates with a single gaze God and the radiation of His goodness) its twofold lack of uniformity needs to be removed. First, that which arises from the variety of external things.... Another lack of uniformity requires to be removed from the soul, and this is owing to the discoursing of reason. This is done by directing all the soul’s operations to the simple contemplation of the intelligible truth, to the *simplex intuitus veritatis*.” This double sacrifice of the senses and discursive reasoning is only made slowly in prayer, and gradually the understanding reaches the point of judging spiritually of all things, according to St. Paul’s words: “But the spiritual man judgeth all things.... For who hath known the mind of the Lord, that he may instruct Him?” (I Cor. 2: 15 f.).

[2132](#) John 16:7.

[2133](#) Acts 3:15.

[2134](#) Acts 4: 12.

[2135](#) Summa, IIa IIae, q.188, a.6: “Teaching and preaching proceed from the fullness of contemplation.”

[2136](#) *Sermons* (Trans. Hugueny), I, 241 ff.

[2137](#) John 12:24f.

[2138](#) Cf. St. Catherine of Genoa, *Treatise on Purgatory*. See also Dict. de spiritualite, “*Catherine de Genes*,” col. 304–308; “The Saint describes the state of the suffering souls by comparison with her own state, that of a soul which God causes to pass through the passive purifications. This explains why she insists so strongly on certain characteristics, especially on the laceration produced in the soul by the effect of two contrary forces: one force which draws it toward God, the object of beatitude; another force which repulses it: the opposition between the purity of God and its own imperfection.” She describes the insatiable hunger for the Divinity, and says that the souls purgatory suffer a pain so great that no intellect can, in the present life, comprehend it. She holds also that this suffering increases with the progress of the purification, for the desire for God grows; and yet there is a holy joy which also grows, for the soul makes more account of the divine will than of its own suffering. God removes every root of egoism by producing in the soul “the last act of love by which He completes its purification” (*Purg.*, chap. 11). Purgatory ceases to be a prison imposed on the soul and becomes a prison desired, wished for, anxiously sought for (*Purg.*, chap. 18). This entire article in the *Dict. de spir.* on St. Catherine of Genoa is of great interest. See also how she conceived of the purgative, the illuminative, and the unitive ways.

[2139](#) Cf. chaps. 3–6, 11–16.

[2140](#) Denzinger, Enchiridion, *Errors of Fenelon*, nos. 1333 ff.: “Deus aemulator vult purgare amorem, nullum ei ostendendo perfugium neque ullam spem quoad suum interesse proprium etiam aeternum.” “In uno extremarum probationum casu sacrificium aeternae beatitudinis fit aliquo modo absolutum.” “In extremis probationibus rarest animae invincibiliter persuasum esse peruatione reflexa, et quae non est intimus conscientiae fundus, se juste reprobata esse a Deo.” “In hac involuntaria impressione desperationis conficit sacrificium absolutum sui interesse proprii quoad aeternitatem.”

[2141](#) Rom. 4: 18.

[2142](#) Rom. 1:17.

[2143](#) Cf II Cor. 4:7–10.

[2144](#) Ibid., 12:9.

[2145](#) Luke 24:26.

[2146](#) Rom. 8: 16f.

[2147](#) Summa, IIIa, q. 62, a. 2: “Sacramental grace confers something in addition to the grace of the virtues and gifts...; thus man becomes a member of Christ.

[2148](#) Matt. 27:40.

[2149](#) Mark 15:39.

[2150](#) John 18: 36.

[2151](#) Luke 23:34.

[2152](#) John 19: 30.

[2153](#) Rom. 4: 18.

[2154](#) Ps. 114:4 f.

[2155](#) Ps. 21: 1–4.

[2156](#) Job 17:3.

[2157](#) John 8: 12.

[2158](#) Cajetan says in his commentary on IIa IIae, q. 17, a.5: “By hope I desire God not for my own sake, but for myself for the sake of God Himself.” God remains the ultimate end of the act of hope, and when this act is that of living hope, vivified by charity, we desire God, our supreme Good, in order to glorify Him eternally. The motive of charity elevates that of hope, but it does not suppress it.

[2159](#) *Treatise on the Love of God*, Bk. IX, chaps. 2–6, 15 f.

[2160](#) John 4:34.

[2161](#) Rom. 8: 3 1–39.

[2162](#) In *Retraite de dix jours a l’usage des Carmelites* (p. 72), Reverend Mother Mary of the Conception, Carmelite of Aix (1877), says on this subject: “To understand

and practice annihilation of self and to give oneself up to grace in such a way as to accept humiliation, we need a model whose faithful copy we may become; in our repugnances and weaknesses, We need the strength of Jesus Christ Himself. His life must be so imprinted on us that, with Him and like Him, we can say: ‘Behold I come,’ and at the same time give ourselves up entirely to grace....

“As long as our will does not embrace humiliations and sacrifices of every kind, the work of God will not be done in our souls, or will be done only imperfectly. Patience in trials is indeed something, but it is not all. One can be sanctified by resignation, but one rises above self only by union and participation in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Therein is our strength and the principle of this divine life which is founded on the ruins of our self-love.... The strengthening of one’s will against all the repugnances of nature is obtained only by constant and persevering prayer, great distrust of self, and trust in God which has no other limit than His omnipotence.”

[2163](#) Bk. II, chap. 12, passim.

[2164](#) *Treatise on the Love of God*, Bk. I, chap. 15.

[2165](#) Summa, Ia IIae, q. 73, a. 1 ad 3um.

[2166](#) Ibid., q.86, a.1.

[2167](#) St. Thomas, Ia, q.57, a. 4.

[2168](#) John 10: II f.

[2169](#) Luke2:34 f.

[2170](#) Cf. St. Thomas, *In Isaiam*, chap. 24: “The visitation of the Lord is multiple; of consolation... of correction... and at times of condemnation.

[2171](#) Some persons, for example, go to Mass daily and receive Holy Communion because, without doubt, it is essentially better and more profitable for the soul to do so, but also because it is the custom in the circle in which they move. If this custom disappeared, they too would perhaps cease to go to Mass and to receive Holy Communion daily. The virtues must be increasingly practiced for love of God, independently of these inferior, wholly accessory motives.

[2172](#) Cf. I Cor. 4:7.

[2173](#) Phil. 2:13.

[2174](#) Thus at Mass we say before Communion: “Fac me tuis semper inhaerere mandatis et a te nunquam separari permittas.”

[2175](#) *Lib. de similitudinibus*, chaps. 100 f.

[2176](#) A very pious person asked the Lord to make her know her nothingness; sometime later she had to spend a night in adoration before the Blessed Sacrament. As a rule she had facility in her prayer, which seemed to be the prayer of quiet; but at the beginning of this night of adoration, she experienced a complete void in herself, an absolute coldness, and she heard these words: “You asked Me to make you know your nothingness: behold it.”

[2177](#) We treated this question of the passive purification of faith, hope, and charity, in *L’Amour de Dieu et la croix de Jesus*, II, 575–632. We ourselves understood as never before the meaning and import of the teaching of St. John of the Cross on this point on reading *La petite vie de sainte Therese de l’Enfant-Jesus*, especially chapter nine, where the author speaks of the dark night and the tunnel through which the saint had to pass in order to reach the transforming union. The idea came to us then to compare the teaching of St. John of the Cross on the passive purification of the spirit with what St. Thomas says of the formal motive of the theological virtues. It is marvellous how mutually illuminating are the teachings of these two great masters.

[2178](#) A person who was very much tried wrote us on this subject: “These last days a thick and somber veil covered my poor soul... I walked gropingly, forcing myself to remember, in order to direct myself, the truths of faith to which I would have wished to cling; but I was like a shipwrecked person, who, to save himself, struggles madly toward a rock and, when he seems to reach it, is thrown back by the waves; thus my soul could not grasp the certitude of what one must believe.... A single conviction seemed to impose itself on me: the nothingness of everything supernatural, and, with a sort of certitude, the negation of eternal life. All this imposed itself on my spirit in spite of me, with, as it were, indisputable evidence to which I had inevitably to resign myself.... It was like the crumbling away of my beloved faith, which for so long a time had guided my life.... However, occasionally the thought struck me: If I should acquiesce in these invitations, I would doubt the words of our Lord, who is too holy to be able to lie, and I felt as an imperious duty the necessity of being faithful to Him for the honor of our mutual love, for we had given each other all that we are. And then I was able to say: Lord, I believe, I will to believe, but increase my faith.” We recounted at greater length the struggles of this valiant soul in the story of her life: *Mere Françoise de Jesus, fondatrice de la Compagnie de la Vierge* (Desclee de Brouwer, 1937), pp. 43–65.

[2179](#) The contemplative soul then receives, as St. John of the Cross explains (The Dark Night, Bk. II, chaps. 5, 8 f.), a supernatural light, that of the gift of understanding, which, revealing the spirit of the word of God, obliges the soul to go beyond the letter and its inferior habits of conceiving of the divine perfections. This infused light illumines the wholly supernatural heights of the mysteries of infinite justice, infinite mercy, predestination, the passion of Christ, the salvation of souls. Then the petty conceptions to which the soul was accustomed, shine forth, as it were. The soul is in astonishment in this spiritual night. In reality, there is here an excessive light for eyes that are still too weak to bear it. But the soul emerges from the crucible with a far higher and firmer knowledge of the truths of faith, passing beyond dogmatic formulas that it may believe profoundly in the mysteries expressed by these formulas, and henceforth live continually by them.

[2180](#) We explained the foundations of this doctrine in *Christian Perfection and Contemplation*, pp. 74 ff.

[2181](#) The Council of Trent, Sess.VI, chap. 6 (Denzinger, no. 798) enumerates among the acts that dispose the sinner to conversion or justification: the act of faith united to the fear of God, the act of hope, and the initial love of God, the Source of all justice, which inclines the soul to hatred of sin.

St. Thomas (Ia IIae, q. 113, a. 3–5) explains at greater length how faith, hope, and charity concur in the conversion of the soul to God. In the second conversion, the

passive purification of the senses, and in the third, the night of the spirit, there is something similar, but more lofty and more profound. In the third conversion the soul turns definitively toward God in order to reach that transforming union and confirmation in grace which was granted on Pentecost to the apostles, when since the Ascension they had been deprived of the sight of Christ's humanity.

[2182](#) Cf. Mark 4:8: "And some fell upon good ground and brought forth fruit that grew up and increased and yielded, one thirty, another sixty, and another a hundred."

[2183](#) Wisd. 7:8 f.

[2184](#) Matt. 13:46.

[2185](#) Ps. 102:8. Cf. Lam. 3:11: "His commiserations have not failed."

[2186](#) "God never commands the impossible, but in commanding warns us to do what we are able and to ask for grace to accomplish what we cannot do." Council of Trent, Sess. VI, chap. II (Denzinger, no. 804). This quotation is taken from St. Augustine, *De natura et gratia*, chap. 43, no. 50.

[2187](#) Cf. 1 Cor. 10: 13: "God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that which you are able; but will make also with temptation issue, that you may be able to bear it."

[2188](#) Isa. 54: 10.

[2189](#) Ps. 26:5, 6, 8–10.

[2190](#) Lam. 3:18–22, 31–33. We have established the fact that this page of Jeremias has restored hope to greatly tried souls that believed themselves on the point of saying, like the Prophet: "My end and my hope is perished from the Lord." It is a question here of hoping against all hope, as St. Paul says in Romans 4: 18.

[2191](#) Esther 14:3 f., II f., 19.

[2192](#) Cf. The Interior Castle, sixth mansion, chap. I. At this stage it is not rare for the soul to be tempted in regard to the mystery of predestination, as St. Catherine of Siena was by the devil, who said to her: "What is the use of these mortifications if you are not predestined? And if you are, you will be saved without them." To which the saint replied: "If I am predestined, what is the use of your efforts to destroy me? And if I am not, why take so much trouble? "

Predestination, like Providence, bears not only on the end, but on the means to attain it. And as in the natural order the harvest is obtained only by seed, in the order of grace, salvation is obtained only by prayer and the practice of the virtues.

We must also tell ourselves that the certitude of hope is not precisely that of attaining our end; to have such a certitude, we would need a special revelation of our predestination; it is rather a certitude of tendency, as St. Thomas says so well (IIa IIae, q.18, a. 4): "Hope tends to its end with certainty, as though sharing in the certainty of faith." The certitude of hope is that of a tendency which, under the light of faith, is infallibly in the true direction of end to be attained. It is confidence in God who is infinitely helpful and in His promises. Thus when we have taken at Paris the train that goes to Rome, we firmly hope to reach the end of the journey; we tend surely toward it.

[2193](#) Mark 15:34.

[2194](#) Ps. 21: 2.

[2195](#) Cf. Luke 18: 13.

[2196](#) Ps.91:5.

[2197](#) *Une Rose effeuillee*, chap. 9.

[2198](#) Luke 23:46.

[2199](#) *The Dark Night*, Bk. II, chap. II.

[2200](#) *The Interior Castle*, sixth mansion, chap. II.

[2201](#) Cant. 8:6.

[2202](#) *The Interior Castle*, sixth mansion, chap. I.

[2203](#) Life, chaps. 28–30.

[2204](#) Life, chap. 28.

[2205](#) *The Interior Castle*, sixth mansion, chap. I.

[2206](#) Cf. Sermons de Tauler (trans. Hugueny, Thery), 1, 251, 263, 301, 311 ff., 345.

²²⁰⁷ Rom. 8: 17. Blessed Angela of Foligno wrote some magnificent pages of incomparable realism on the night of the spirit. Cf. especially *Le Livre des visions et instructions* (trans. E. Hello), chap. 7: The sight of the cross; chap. 9: The way of the cross; chap. 16: The great darkness: “One day my soul was ravished and I saw God in a light superior to every known light.... I saw God in a darkness, and necessarily in a darkness, because He is too far above the spirit, and no proportion exists between Him and anything that can become the object of a thought.... I see nothing, I see all. Certitude is obtained in the darkness. The more profound the darkness, so much more does the good exceed all. This is the reserved mystery.... The divine power, wisdom, and will, which I saw marvelously elsewhere seems less than this. This is a whole; the others could be called parts.” Blessed Angela had then through eminent infused contemplation, the experimental knowledge of what speculative theology expresses in the following terms: the Deity, or the intimate life of God, contains formally and eminently absolute perfections: being, intelligence, wisdom, love, and so forth, which are naturally sharable and naturally knowable. The Deity as such surpasses every concept, it can be participated in only through sanctifying grace, which is not naturally knowable. Cf. Cajetan on Ia, q. 39, a. 1, no. 7: “The formal reason of the Deity is especially in its being and in all its attributes, for it is above being and above unity, etc.”

See also Blessed Angela of Foligno, op. cit., chap. 33: True love and false love; chap. 46: The embrace; chap. 55: Poverty of spirit; chap. 56: Ecstasy; chap. 61: The third companion of Jesus Christ: Suffering; chap. 65: The ways of love.

Over a period of about thirty years, in our ministry we have found at least twenty times in contemplative communities the night of the spirit quite clearly characterized, and, in several cases, without any malady, in very rational subjects whose duty it was to direct a community or a congregation, and who did it very well.

²²⁰⁸ *Summa*, IIa IIae, q. 180, a.6.

²²⁰⁹ *Summa*, IIa IIae, q.24, a.9.

²²¹⁰ God, objective beatitude, should evidently be loved for Himself, more than subjective beatitude, which is created and finite.

²²¹¹ Cf. St. Thomas. Ia, q.43. a.3. We set forth this doctrine in Volume I, chapter 4 of this work.

²²¹² John 14:13.

²²¹³ Ibid., 26.

²²¹⁴ Cf. I John 2:27.

²²¹⁵ Rom. 8: 14–16.

²²¹⁶ Cf. IIa IIae, q.45, a. 1,2.

²²¹⁷ Luke 24: 32.

²²¹⁸ In the language of the schools we would say: “The act of filial love, proceeding from the special inspiration of the Holy Ghost, is at one and the same time that which is known, and that by which one knows without discourse God dwelling within and vivifying the soul.” Thus we “taste” the revealed mystery of the indwelling of the Blessed Trinity in the just.

²²¹⁹ *Summa*, Ia, q.93, a.3–8.

²²²⁰ Sometimes this supernatural image of God and also of our Lord in the souls of the saints is manifested sensibly. For example, one day Blessed Raymond of Capua, the director of St. Catherine of Siena, questioning whether she was truly led by the Spirit of God, saw the features of his spiritual daughter change into those of our Lord. This was a sensible sign of the transforming union which the great mystics speak of. Likewise, St. Benedict Joseph Labre, in adoration before the Blessed Sacrament, occasionally appeared to have our Lord’s features. An artist, who had been trying for a long time to paint the face of Christ, was very much struck by this sight and sketched his features.

²²²¹ Bk. IV, chaps. 21 f.

²²²² Cf. Ia IIae, q. 112, 5.

²²²³ *Contra Gentes*, Bk. IV, chap. 22.

²²²⁴ Ibid., chap. 21.

²²²⁵ Ibid.

²²²⁶ Rom. 8: 15 f. The Holy Ghost, who operates in us, excites this movement of filial love and thus gives us immediate testimony of our friendship with God and of our divine filiation. Cf. St. Thomas, *In Ep. ad Rom.*, 8: 16.

²²²⁷ Cf. *Contra Gentes*, Bk. IV, chap. 22, nos. 4 f.

²²²⁸ Ibid., chap. 21, no. 6.

²²²⁹ *Summa*, IIa IIae, q.188, a.6.

²²³⁰ Matt. 18:3.

[2231](#) Matt. 6:22.

[2232](#) *Histoire d'une ame*, chap. 9.

[2233](#) Cf. I Cor. 14:20.

[2234](#) *Treatise on the Love of God*, Bk. IX, chaps. 13 f.

[2235](#) *Histoire d'une ame*, "Souvenirs et conseils," p. 263.

[2236](#) Sess. VI, chap. 16.

[2237](#) The way of childhood thus understood, especially as we see it toward the end of the life of St. Teresa of the Child Jesus, is very elevated in its simplicity. Its lofty simplicity comes home to us because the saint certainly passed through the night of the spirit (which corresponds to the sixth mansion of St. Teresa of Avila), as may be seen on reading chapter nine of the *Histoire d'une ame*. It was the reading of this chapter, some thirty years ago, that gave us the idea of explaining the night of the spirit by a profound and intense influence of the gift of understanding, which brings out in powerful relief the formal motive of humility and of each of the three theological virtues. Thereby these infused virtues are purified of all alloy or attachment to secondary and accessory motives on which until then the soul had dwelt excessively. Cf. supra, chapter 39 on the effects of the passive purification of the spirit.

[2238](#) On this subject, consult Benedict XIV: *De servo rum Dei beatificatione*, III, chaps. 21 f., on how the examination into the heroic degree of the virtues of the servants of God should be made in view of beatification.

[2239](#) *Commentary on Matt.* 5, lect. I.

[2240](#) *De sermone Domini in monte*, Bk. I, chap. 4.

[2241](#) Cf. Ia IIae, q.61, a.5; q.69.

[2242](#) Ibid.

[2243](#) Ibid., q.69.

[2244](#) *De servorum Dei beatificatione*, Bk. III, chap. 21.

[2245](#) Summa, Ia IIae, q.65. a.1–3; q.66, a.2; q.68. a.5.

[2246](#) Two observations are essential here:

(1) It would be imprudent to affirm too hastily the heroic degree of a particular virtue in a servant of God and then to deduce, as it were a priori, that he must also have the other virtues in a heroic degree. To affirm the heroic quality of one of them without rash haste, the elevation of the others must have already been considered.

(2) Although the virtues grow together, especially the infused virtues, a given servant of God has a greater natural or acquired disposition for the practice, for example, of fortitude than for that of meekness, or inversely. In addition, there are servants of God who, by reason of a special mission, receive actual graces which incline them more particularly to the exercise of one virtue than to that of another. Cf. St. Thomas, Ia IIae, q.66, a.2, corp., and ad 2um.

[2247](#) Cf. I Cor. 13:4–7.

[2248](#) Op. cit., III, chap. 21.

[2249](#) Cf. St. Francis de Sales, *Second Sermon for the Visitation, Explanation of the Magnificat*: The union of profound humility and lofty charity.

[2250](#) Op. cit., chap. 20.

[2251](#) We treated this subject at greater length in "L'heroicite de la vertu chez les enfants" (Anne de Guigne), *La Vie spirituelle*, January 1, 1935, pp. 34–51.

[2252](#) Ps. 8:3.

[2253](#) Matt. 21:15f.

[2254](#) Father Bernard des Ronces, Nellie (Maison du Bon-Pasteur, Paris).

[2255](#) Myriam de G., *Guglielmina*, 1898–1909 (Paris).

[2256](#) These and many other similar facts are related in a book written with great love of God: *Mes Benjamins*, Myriam de G., Italian transl., Turin.

[2257](#) It should be noted that in the innocence of the baptized child the Holy Ghost has not much to purify before communicating His light of life and attracting power. There are, to be sure, certain consequences of original sin, which, after baptism, are like wounds in the process of healing; but they are not poisoned by repeated personal sins. The Holy Ghost dispenses the child that is faithful to grace in the accomplishment of the duties proper to its age from the painful purifications necessary, according to

the degree of their guilt, for Christians who have sinned. Such a child may rise to great heights of virtue.

[2258](#) Firmness in adherence comes from infused faith itself; promptness in rejecting error and penetration come especially from the gift of understanding, so far as it perfects faith. Cf. *Ila Ilae*, q.8, a.1, 3.

[2259](#) Cf. Philip of the Blessed Trinity, *Summa theol. mysticae* (ed. 1874), III, 132 ff.

[2260](#) Cf. chap. 39.

[2261](#) Heb. 11:17, 19.

[2262](#) Isa. 55:8.

[2263](#) Isa. 55: 1,7, 10–12.

[2264](#) *The Dialogue*, chap. 99.

[2265](#) Ibid., chap. 100.

[2266](#) Ibid., chap. 85.

[2267](#) Ibid., chap. 78.

[2268](#) Cf. I John 5:4 f.

[2269](#) Heb. 11:17–38.

[2270](#) Heb. 12:1–4.

[2271](#) Ps. 125:5.

[2272](#) Cf. St. Thomas, *Ila Ilae*, q. 17, a. 1; 2, 4, 5.

[2273](#) Council of Trent, Sess. VI, chap. 13; Denzinger, no. 806.

[2274](#) Rom. 4:18.

[2275](#) Cf. Council of Trent, *ibidem*.

[2276](#) St. Thomas, *Ila Ilae*, q.18, a.4: “Certainty is found essentially in the cognitive power; by participation, in whatever is moved infallibly to its end by the cognitive power.... Thus (under the direction of faith) hope tends to its end with certainty, as though sharing in the certainty of faith which is in the cognitive faculty.”

[2277](#) Luke 11:9–13.

[2278](#) Rom. 8:31.

[2279](#) Cf. II Cor. 12:7–10.

[2280](#) Phil. 4:13.

[2281](#) Isa. 53:5.

[2282](#) Cf. Father Cajetan of the Holy Name of Mary, C.P., *Oraison et ascension mystique de saint Paul de la Croix* (Louvain, 1930), chap. 3: “Quarante-cinq anneés de desolations.”

[2283](#) Luke 16: 10.

[2284](#) Ps. 22:1, 4.

[2285](#) Job 1:21.

[2286](#) Prov. 3:5 f.

[2287](#) Ps. 30:2.

[2288](#) Lam. 3:22.

- [2289](#) Cf. Rom. 8: 32.
- [2290](#) *The Dialogue*, chap. 119.
- [2291](#) Ibid.
- [2292](#) Cf. La Vie du Bx Pere J. Eymard, founder of the Fathers of the Blessed Sacrament.
- [2293](#) Blessed Raymond of Capua, *Life of St. Catherine*, Part I, chap. 10.
- [2294](#) Ibid.
- [2295](#) *The Dialogue*, chap. 12. This dialogue was dictated about two years before the saint's death.
- [2296](#) We have an example of heroic hope in St. Mary Magdalen Postel, foundress of the Sisters of Mercy (d. Vie by Msgr. Arsene Legoux). In Normandy during the French Revolution, she sustained the courage of several priests whom she assisted, and she made her foundation amid almost unbelievable difficulties, after having been abandoned by her director, who saw in these difficulties a sign that the work was not willed by God. The humble girl who had no resources except the toil of her hands, hoped against all hope. The work was founded and flourishes today, and the valiant foundress, now canonized, gives the impression of eminent sanctity.
- [2297](#) Treatise on the Love of God, Bk. VIII, chaps. 5 f.; Bk. IX, chaps. 3–6, 15 f.
- [2298](#) Ecclus. 11: 14.
- [2299](#) Cf. II Kings 16: 10.
- [2300](#) Ps. 5:13.
- [2301](#) The Canticle of Canticles, V, 8; VIII, 6.
- [2302](#) Opus., 61.
- [2303](#) *The Dark Night*, Bk. II. chaps. 18–20.
- [2304](#) Ibid., chap. 20.
- [2305](#) *The Dialogue*, chap. 74.
- [2306](#) Ibid., chap. 78.
- [2307](#) Ibid., chap. 76.
- [2308](#) Ibid., chap. 78.
- [2309](#) Summa, IIa IIae. q.45. a.2.
- [2310](#) *The Dialogue*, chap. 4.
- [2311](#) Cf. I John 3:18.
- [2312](#) Not for eternity. but for a more or less protracted period.
- [2313](#) Rom. 9:3 f.
- [2314](#) John 15: 12.
- [2315](#) Ibid., 13:35.
- [2316](#) We find an example of this goodness united to deep humility in the life of the foundress of the Cenacle, who at the age of thirty-three resigned as superior general, and for almost fifty years obeyed like a simple sister. She was so obedient that it was only at the end of her life that those about her understood all that the Lord had given her and how closely she was united to Him. He had hidden her, but the radiation of her goodness in humility ended by revealing her. It was she who, by her love for God and souls, bore the burden of the congregation of which she was truly the foundress. Cf. P. H. Perroy, S.J., *Une grande humble*, Paris, 1916.
- [2317](#) John 17:20 f.
- [2318](#) One of the characteristics of heroic charity is to bear with great generosity the sufferings that come from those one loves. Thus saints who, like St. Catherine of Siena and St. Joan of Arc, had a great love for the Church, have also had to suffer particularly from the faults of churchmen. This suffering was in the nature of reparation.

- [2319](#) John 17:22.
- [2320](#) Matt. 11: 29.
- [2321](#) Summa, IIa IIae, q. 161, a. I, 3.
- [2322](#) *Lib. de similitudinibus*, chaps. 99–108.
- [2323](#) Cf. IIa IIae, q. 161, a.6 ad 3um.
- [2324](#) Eccclus. 19: 26 f.
- [2325](#) Phil. 4:5.
- [2326](#) Cf. IIa IIae, q. 160, a. I, 2.
- [2327](#) Ibid., q. 157, a. 1, 2, 4.
- [2328](#) Summa, IIa IIae, q. 123, a.6: “The principal act of fortitude is endurance, that is, to stand immovable in the midst of dangers rather than to attack them.”
- [2329](#) Ibid., q. 129, a.4 ad 3um: “Every virtue derives from its species a certain luster or adornment which is proper to each virtue; but further adornment results from the very greatness of a virtuous deed, through magnanimity which makes all virtues greater.”
- [2330](#) Ibid., q.139.
- [2331](#) Cf. IIa IIae, q.47, a.7.
- [2332](#) Matt. 10: 16.
- [2333](#) Such is the work of the *Rehabilitées* founded by the Dominican, Father Lataste, who died in the odor of sanctity.
- [2334](#) Eccclus. 4: 33–36.
- [2335](#) The history of the Church recalls the memory of some religious who had great zeal, the stuff of sanctity, terrible trials, but who seemed to have lacked heroic obedience to superiors whose personal lives left much to be desired. Whatever be the merits of these servants of God, their beatification will never be considered.
- [2336](#) Cf. Denzinger, *Enchiridion*, no. 1155.
- [2337](#) *The Interior Castle*, second mansion, chap. I; sixth mansion, chap. 7. *Life*, chap. 22.
- [2338](#) *The Interior Castle*, sixth mansion, chap. 7.
- [2339](#) *The Dialogue*, chaps. 21, 26, 59, 75, 76. Christ is compared to a bridge which links earth to heaven. This bridge has three steps to which correspond three states of the soul: the feet, the heart, the mouth.
- [2340](#) Phil. 1:21,23.
- [2341](#) *In Ep. ad Philipp.*, 1:21.
- [2342](#) Cf. I Cor. 1:22–24.
- [2343](#) Ibid., 2:2.
- [2344](#) Eph. I:17–20.
- [2345](#) Eph. 3: 17–19.
- [2346](#) We developed this point at length in *The Love of God and the Cross of Jesus*, I, 174–223.
- [2347](#) Cf. Dom A. Vonier’s beautiful book, *The Victory of Christ* (Burns, Oates and Washbourne, 1934).
- [2348](#) St. Thomas, IIIa, Q.48, a.2.
- [2349](#) John 16:33. Likewise we read in I John 5:4: “This is the victory which overcometh the world, our faith.” And in Hebrews 11: 1: “Faith is the substance of things to be hoped for”; our faith is victorious over the spirit of the world, because it makes us scorn those things that would separate us from God.
- [2350](#) *Summa*, Ia, q.20, a.4, c. and ad Ium.

[2351](#) Ibid., IIa, q. I, a.3 ad 3um.

[2352](#) John 3:16.

[2353](#) In the original, this paragraph appears as an addendum, referring to this chapter. Cf. also Note, p. 570.

[2354](#) *Liber de vera et falsa poenitentia*, chap. 13: “Semper doleat poenitens, et de dolore gaudeat.” Cf. St. Thomas, IIIa, suppl., q.4. a.2: “Whether it is expedient to grieve for sin continually.”

[2355](#) Cf. St. Thomas, Ia IIae, q.69, a.2; IIa IIae, q.24, a.3 ad 2um; *De veritate*, q. 14, a.2.

[2356](#) Father Mary John Joseph Lataste, O.P., founder of the OEuvre des Rehabilites de Bethanie, without knowing the prayer of St. Nicholas of Flue, which we have just quoted, composed the following very similar prayer: “O my Jesus, how I love Thee! Give Thyself to me and give me to Thyself! Identify me with Thyself; may my will be Thine! Incorporate me in Thee, that I may live only in Thee and for Thee! May I spend for Thee all that I have received from Thee, keeping nothing for myself! May I die to everything for Thee! Grant that I may win souls for Thee! Souls, O my Jesus, souls.”

[2357](#) The Book of Eternal Wisdom, Part III, chap. 5.

[2358](#) Acts 2:23 f.

[2359](#) Acts 3:15; 4:11 f.

[2360](#) Eph. 3:14–19.

[2361](#) Cf. IIa IIae, q. 188, a.6.

[2362](#) Ibid., q. 182, a. I: “The contemplative life is simply more excellent than the active.” Ibid., a.4: “With regard to its nature... the contemplative life precedes the active, inasmuch as it applies itself to things which precede and are better than others, wherefore it moves and directs the active life.”

[2363](#) Ibid., q. 188, a.6.

[2364](#) *Cursus theologicus*, tr. XX, De statu religioso, disp. II, dub. III: “The proximate end of the mixed life is contemplation that it may overflow in action on behalf of one’s neighbor.”

[2365](#) De hominum statibus, in IIam IIae, q. 188, a.6: “A mixed religious order aims principally at contemplation that it may fructify exteriorly for the salvation of souls.”

[2366](#) Cf. IIIa, q.40, a. I ad 2um; a.2 ad 3um.

[2367](#) Cf. Ia, q.20, a.4 ad Ium.

[2368](#) Cf. IIa IIae, q. 177, a.1.

[2369](#) Cf. Ia IIae, q.106, a.1.

[2370](#) Cf. II Cor. 4:8–10.

[2371](#) Mark 10: 30.

[2372](#) The Dialogue, chap. 139.

[2373](#) La Doctrine spirituelle, Second principle, sect. I, chap. 3, a.4: Of the love of crosses.

[2374](#) Cf. Cardinal Mercier, *La Vie interieure, appel aux ames sacerdotales* 1919, pp. 237 ff.: The faithful soul experiences the divine intimacy. Why there are relatively few souls that taste this union. Our responsibility in this regard. What is the apostolic vocation? Pp. 244–96: The devotion of the shepherd to his flock: universal charity, magnanimous charity, effective charity. Pp. 296–315: Worship and preaching of the Christian mystery, the substance of the Gospel. Is this mystery the preferred object of our prayers? The decline of religious beliefs and the insufficiency of dogmatic teaching. Let your life be a life of prayer. Ibid., pp. 443–70.

See also J. Maritain, “Action et contemplation,” *Revue Thomiste*, May/June, 1937, pp. 18–51.

[2375](#) Encyclical *Ad diem illum*, February 1, 1904.

[2376](#) *Acta Apost. Sed.*, X, 181, Letter of March 11, 1918.

[2377](#) Col. 1:24.

[2378](#) Cf. Anthony Lestra, *Le Pere Chevrier* (Paris, 1934), p. 165.

²³⁷⁹ As another example of the life of reparation, we cite that of the holy Abbe Girard, subdeacon of Coutances, who died in 1921 after twenty-two years of suffering. His life has been written under the title: *Vingt-deux ans de martyre*, by Myriam de G. (Lyons), who herself has been nailed to a bed of pain for twenty-five years. After receiving the subdiaconate, the holy cleric was stricken with tuberculosis of the bones of the knees. In spite of several operations and his pilgrimages to Lourdes, he did not recover, but he obtained a greater grace, that of daily offering his suffering to render fruitful the apostolate of the priests of his generation. After twenty-two years of martyrdom, his body, eaten away by tuberculosis, was one great wound. As he lay dying, he accepted the continuation of his sufferings for as many years more if it were necessary. His painful immolation, united to that of the Mass, had made a saint of him; it must have obtained the conversion of a great number of souls.

²³⁸⁰ Father Cajetan of the Holy Name of Mary, C.P., *Oraison et ascension mystique de saint Paul de la Croix* (Louvain, 1930), pp. 86–88, 115–77. See also the appendix to this chapter.

²³⁸¹ Luke 9:23: “And He said to all: If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me.”

²³⁸² Mere Franfoise de Jesus (abridgment of her life, to which we have added extracts from her writings), p. 53.

²³⁸³ Ibid., p. 54.

²³⁸⁴ Ibid., pp. 143–45.

²³⁸⁵ Ibid., p. 147.

²³⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 177.

²³⁸⁷ Ibid., p. 179.

²³⁸⁸ *The Dialogue*, chap. 74.

²³⁸⁹ Ibid., chap. 78.

²³⁹⁰ Cf. I Pet. 2:4f.

²³⁹¹ These pages appeared in the October, 1938, issue of the *Etudes carmelitaines*, which was devoted to the study of the “mystical night.” This number contained articles dealing with a psychological description, a theological explanation, the examination of natural or morbid cases which have some resemblances to this state.

²³⁹² Bk. II, chap. 10.

²³⁹³ Cf. *A Spiritual Canticle*, Part II, st. 10.

²³⁹⁴ *The Interior Castle*, seventh mansion, chap. 4: “His Majesty can bestow no greater favor on us than to give us a life such as was led by His beloved Son. Therefore, as I have often told you, I feel certain that these graces (of the transforming union) are sent to strengthen our weakness so that we may imitate Him by suffering much. We always find that those nearest to Christ our Lord bear the heaviest cross: think of what His glorious Mother and the apostles bore.”

²³⁹⁵ *L'Amour de Dieu et la croix de Jesus* (1919), II, 625–31, 814–23.

²³⁹⁶ Lettere, edited by Father Amedeo, Rome, 1914, 4 vols. See also the first biography of the saint by Blessed V. Strambi, 1786.

²³⁹⁷ Museum Lessianum, Louvain, 1930.

²³⁹⁸ Cf. Father Cajetan, op. cit., p. 8.

²³⁹⁹ Op.cit., p. 12.

²⁴⁰⁰ Ibid., p. 15.

²⁴⁰¹ Ibid., p. 19.

²⁴⁰² Ibid., pp. 41–63.

²⁴⁰³ Ibid., p. 55.

²⁴⁰⁴ Ibid., pp. 57–73.

²⁴⁰⁵ Ibid., p. 57.

²⁴⁰⁶ Ibid., p. 62.

²⁴⁰⁷ Ibid., pp. 85–97.

[2408](#) Ibid., pp. 2, 115–77.

[2409](#) Ibid., p. 2.

[2410](#) Ibid., p. 96.

[2411](#) Summary of the Process, I, 317, 64.

[2412](#) Ibid., I, 324, 103.

[2413](#) Ibid., I, 324, 105.

[2414](#) Luke 18: 1.

[2415](#) Father Cajetan, op. cit., p. 167.

[2416](#) Ibid.

[2417](#) *L'Amour de Dieu et la croix de Jesus*, II, 549–656.

[2418](#) Cf. I Cor. 2:10.

[2419](#) As far as we are acquainted with the life of Father Surin, we think that he underwent this passive purification and acquired great merits in it.

[2420](#) Rom. 8: 17. Moreover, even when the night of the spirit is chiefly purificatory and precedes the transforming union, often there exists in it to some degree the other character of reparation for one's neighbor. This statement can be verified in Bk. III, chap. 11, sect. I of the *Life of St. Vincent de Paul* by Abelly (cf. *Revue d'ascetique et mystique*, 1932, pp. 398 ff.), where the author says that St. Vincent accepted to suffer for a doctor of the Sorbonne who was greatly tormented by temptations against faith. Then for four years St. Vincent de Paul himself had to resist such strong temptations against this virtue that he kept asking himself whether or not he consented to them. At this time he wrote the Credo on a sheet of paper which he placed over his heart, and when the temptation was most violent, he would press the Credo against his heart to give himself an exterior sign of his fidelity. At the end of these four years, St. Vincent de Paul's faith was notably increased by all the heroic acts he had had to make while passing through this tunnel. We believe that the same observation must be made in regard to the greatest interior sufferings of the holy Cure of Ars and also in regard to the passive purification of the spirit which St. Teresa of the Child Jesus underwent toward the end of her life (cf. *Histoire d'une ame*, 1923, chaps. 9, 12). What she wrote at this time is quite revealing and should be reread.

Cf. also L. Reypens, "La nuit de l'esprit chez Ruusbroec" (*Etudes carmelitaines*, October, 1938, p. 78) on the summit of the mystical life in emptiness and abandonment.

The night of the spirit seems also to have been prolonged after the transforming union in the life of Venerable Mary of the Incarnation, Ursuline of Tours and Quebec. Cf. P. J. Klein, M.S.C., *L'Itineraire mystique de la venerable Mere Marie de l'Incarnation*, Paris, 1937. The conclusions of this author's thesis are, however, very debatable on several points. Cf. *Ami du clerge*, February 16, 1939, pp. 98–100.

To conclude we shall quote from a Sermon for the Monday before Palm Sunday (transl. Hugueny, 1, 265–69) by Tauler, a great spiritual writer whom St. Paul of the Cross often read. This is how Tauler describes the divine union in the higher faculties: "The spirit is then ravished above all its faculties, in a desolate desert of which no one can speak, in the secret darkness of the good without determined mode. There the spirit is introduced into the unity of Unity, simple and without determined mode, so profoundly that it loses the feeling of every distinction.... But when these men return to themselves, they discern all things in joy and perfection, as no one can do. This discernment is born in simple Unity. Thus they discern with clarity and truth all the articles of pure faith.... No one understands true discernment better than those who attain to Unity. It is called, and it truly is, *ineffable darkness*, and yet it is the essential light. It is also called a *desert desolate* beyond all expression; no one can find a road or anything definite in it: it is superior to every mode.

"This is how this darkness must be understood: It is a light which no created intellect can naturally attain or comprehend. And it is a savage place, because it has no (natural) way of access. When the spirit is introduced here, it is above itself.... Man should then in great humility keep himself submissive to God's will. God then demands from man a greater detachment than ever..., more purity, more simplicity..., profound humility, and all the virtues which develop in the lower faculties. It is thus that man becomes the familiar of God and thence is born a divine man." St. Paul of the Cross, who often read Tauler, must have read this page, which seems to explain in part the reparatory night in which he lived for so long a time after having been raised to the transforming union.

[2421](#) In the Blessed Trinity we distinguish the essential love common to the three divine Persons, the notional or spirated love, by which the Father and the Son spirate the Holy Ghost, and personal love, which is the Holy Ghost Himself, the term of active spiration, as the Word is the term of eternal generation.

[2422](#) Summa, Ia, q.38, a.2.

[2423](#) Cf. St. Thomas, *Contra Gentes*, Bk. IV, chaps. 21 f., "De effectibus attributis Spiritui Sancto." Among these effects, St. Thomas points out especially infused contemplation and infused love, which give the holy liberty of the children of God. In chapter 22 he says: "The special characteristic of friendship is to converse with one's friend. Moreover, the conversation of man with God is by the contemplation of Him, as the Apostle said (Phil. 3:20): 'Our conversation is in heaven.' Because therefore the Holy Spirit makes us lovers of God, it follows that by the Holy Spirit we are made contemplators of God; whence the Apostle says (II Cor. 3: 18): 'But we all beholding the glory of the Lord with open face, are transformed into the same image from glory to glory, as by the Spirit of the Lord.' "These effects attributed to the Holy Ghost by appropriation are also produced by the Father and the Son, for they are effects of the divine power common to the three Persons, but they have a special resemblance to personal Love, which is the proper name of the Holy Ghost.

[2424](#) *In Joannem*, 4: 14.

[2425](#) Rom. 5:5.

[2426](#) Rom. 8: 16.

[2427](#) *In Epist. ad Rom.*, 8:16.

[2428](#) Apoc. 2:17.

[2429](#) Cf. I Cor. 2:10, 12.

[2430](#) Cf. St. Thomas, IIa IIae, q. 18, a.4.

[2431](#) Bk. III, chap. 5, *passim*.

[2432](#) Rom. 8: 26 f.

[2433](#) Chap. 91.

[2434](#) Cf. St. Catherine of Siena, *Dialogue* (transl. by E. Cartier, Paris, 1855, chap. 141): “(In malady and affliction) the Holy Ghost, like a tender mother, nourishes these men in the bosom of divine charity. He makes them free and sovereign, delivering them from the servitude of self-love. For where the fire of My infinite charity burns, is never found that water of self-love which extinguishes this sweet fire in the soul.... The Holy Ghost nourishes the just man, He inebriates him with sweetness, overwhelms him with inestimable riches.... Then the soul accepts all afflictions, nothing casts it down, nothing shakes it; it receives great strength and a foretaste of eternal life.” [This chapter does not appear in the English edition. Tr.]

Father Lallemant, S.J., writes in *La Doctrine spirituelle* (4th principle, chap. 2, a. 4): “The Holy Ghost consoles us especially in three things: First, in the uncertainty of our salvation...; a soul that has had some experimental knowledge of God is rarely lost. Secondly, the Holy Ghost consoles us in the temptations of the devil, in the contradictions and afflictions of this life.... Thirdly, the Holy Ghost consoles us in our exile here on earth, far from God.... Holy souls feel, as it were, an infinite void in themselves, which all creatures cannot fill and which can be filled only by the enjoyment of God. As long as they are separated from Him, they languish and suffer a long martyrdom, which would be unbearable to them without the consolations which the Holy Ghost gives them from time to time.”

[2435](#) St. Thomas sets forth this common teaching, as we have pointed out, in the *Contra Gentes* (Bk. IV, chaps. 21 f.), where he describes the effects of the presence of the Holy Ghost in us.

[2436](#) Cf. I John 4: 16.

[2437](#) *Soeur Elisabeth de la Trinite, Souvenirs* (ed. 1935), the story of her life and extracts from her writings. In less than thirty years, ninety thousand copies of this book have been distributed in France.

See also M. M. Philippon, O.P., *The Spiritual Doctrine of Sister Elizabeth of the Trinity* (Westminster, Md., 1947). Cf. especially the following chapters: “Toward Transforming Union,” pp. 22–32; “The Indwelling of the Blessed Trinity,” pp. 46–80; “The Praise of Glory,” pp. 81–100; “Sister Elizabeth of the Trinity and the Souls of Priests,” pp. 135–53; “The Gifts of the Holy Ghost,” pp. 154–88; “The Last Retreat of Laudem Glorae,” pp. 232–55.

[2438](#) Cf. *supra*, chap. 30.

[2439](#) *The Interior Castle*, fourth and fifth mansions.

[2440](#) Chap. I.

[2441](#) Sixth mansion, chap. I.

[2442](#) *Ibid.*

[2443](#) Sixth mansion, chap. 11.

[2444](#) *Life*, by herself, chap. 10, par. 2.

[2445](#) *Ibid.*, par. 29.

[2446](#) Ecstatic union does not of itself suspend the functions of the organic or vegetative organism, that is, those of nutrition and respiration. Cf. St. Thomas, *De veritate*, q. 13, a.4; IIa IIae, q. 175, a.5.

[2447](#) Cf. St. Francis de Sales, *Treatise on the Love of God*, Bk. VII, chaps. 4 ff.

[2448](#) *De veritate*, q. 13, a.3; IIa IIae, q. 175. a.2.

[2449](#) Although certain authors have held the contrary, this is the definite teaching of St. Augustine, St. Jerome, St. John Chrysostom, St. Bernard, St. Thomas, Suarez, Alvarez de Paz, Scaramelli, and Philip of the Blessed Trinity.

[2450](#) Cf. Summa, Ia IIae, q. 10, a.1, 2; IIa IIae, q. 175, a.1 ad 3um.

[2451](#) Sixth mansion, chap. 6.

[2452](#) Cf. A. Poulain, *The Graces of Interior Prayer*, Part III, chap. 18, no. 7.

[2453](#) Cf. *infra*, chap. 57: “The differences between extraordinary divine facts and morbid phenomena.”

[2454](#) Cf. St. Teresa, *The Book of the Foundations* (chap. 6): “I advise prioresses to eliminate with all possible care from their monasteries these long swoons which take their energy away from the faculties and the senses themselves. The soul can no longer make them obey it, and thereby loses merits which might have been acquired by a constant solicitude to please God.”

[2455](#) *De servorum Dei beatificatione*, Bk. III, chap. 49, no. 5. Also Cajetan on IIa IIae, q. 173, a.3.

[2456](#) *The Interior Castle*, sixth mansion, chap. 2.

[2457](#) Summa, IIa IIae, q. 175, a.2 ad 1um.

[2458](#) The Interior Castle, sixth mansion, chap. 4.

[2459](#) Ibid., chap. 5.

[2460](#) *Treatise on the Love of God*, Bk. VII, chap. 7.

[2461](#) *The Interior Castle*, sixth mansion, chap. 11, *passim*.

[2462](#) See also St. Teresa, *Life*, chap. 29; *Relation*, 54. Cf. St. John of the Cross, *The Dark Night*, Bk. II, chaps. II ff.; *The Living Flame of Love*, st. I, v. 2–4; st. 2, v. 1–3. Cf. also Father Gabriel of St. Magdalen, “L’Ecole theresienne et les blessures d’amour mystique,” *Etudes carmelitaines*, October, 1936, pp. 208–42.

The spiritual wound is sometimes accompanied by a corporeal wound of the heart, which is its symbol. Cf. *infra*, the following chapter and chap. 56: “Stigmatization, suggestion, and ecstasy.”

[2463](#) Bk. II.

[2464](#) Sixth mansion, chap. I.

[2465](#) Ibid., chap. 6.

[2466](#) Ibid., chap. 9.

[2467](#) Ibid.

[2468](#) Seventh mansion, chap. 2.

[2469](#) Sixth mansion, chap. 7.

[2470](#) *The Living Flame*, st. 2; *A Spiritual Canticle*, Part III, st. 22 ff.

[2471](#) Seventh mansion, chap. 3.

[2472](#) *The Living Flame*, st. 2; *A Spiritual Canticle*, Part III, st. 22 ff.

[2473](#) The Living Flame, *loco cit.*

[2474](#) Seventh mansion, chap. 2.

[2475](#) *The Living Flame*, st. I, v. 3.

[2476](#) Ibid., v. 4.

[2477](#) Ibid., st. 2, v. 6. Cf. Father Gabriel of St. Magdalen, C.D., “L’union transformante selon saint Jean de la Croix,” *La Vie spirituelle*, March, 1917, pp. 87 ff. G. L. Strena, “Les Sommets de la vie d’amour,” *Angelicum*, January, 1937, pp. 264–80.

[2478](#) St. 16, par. 2, 3.

[2479](#) Cf. I Cor. 6: 17.

[2480](#) St. Thomas, Ia IIae, q. 28, a. I, 2: Union is the effect of love, which itself consists in the union of affection, and desires real union by vision which is like the possession of the object loved. Mutual inherence is also an effect of love; for the loved one is in the lover, in his affection, and this affection inclines the lover toward the beloved.

[2481](#) Bk. II, chap. 29; *A Spiritual Canticle*, st. 30.

[2482](#) Summa, Ia IIae, q.68, a.5; q.66, a.2.

[2483](#) St. 14.

[2484](#) *Life*, chap. 18, par. 16.

[2485](#) St. 14.

[2486](#) John 17: 22 f.

[2487](#) *A Spiritual Canticle*, st. 22.

[2488](#) Cf. Salmanticences, *De gratia*, q. 110, disp. III, dub. XI, no. 259.

[2489](#) The Interior Castle, seventh mansion, chap. 2.

[2490](#) St. 22.

[2491](#) Denzinger, no. 805.

[2492](#) Cf. Father Cajetan of the Holy Name of Mary, *Oraison et ascension mystique de saint Paul de la Croix* (Louvain,⁽⁹³⁰⁾, pp. II5–177. Cf. infra, the appendix to chap. 49.

[2493](#) The Living Flame, st. 2, v. 6.

[2494](#) *Theol. myst. Proaemium*, a.8.

[2495](#) *Direttorio mistico*, tr. II, chap. 22, no. 258.

[2496](#) Summa, IIa IIae, q. 18, a.4.

[2497](#) Rom. 8: 16.

[2498](#) Cf. *The Living Flame* (st. 2, v. 2): “God confers no favors on the body which He does not confer in the first place chiefly on the soul. In that case, the greater the joy and violence of the love which is the cause of the interior wound, the greater will be the pain of the visible wound, and as the former grows so does the latter. The reason is this: such souls as these, being already purified and strong in God, their spirit, strong and sound, delights in the strong and sweet Spirit of God, who, however, causes pain and suffering in their weak and corruptible flesh.” Cf. infra, chap. 56, “Stigmatization.”

[2499](#) *The Interior Castle*, Epilogue.

Section 6

[2500](#) *The Dark Night*, Bk. II, chap. 23.

[2501](#) *The Living Flame*, st. 2, v. 5.

[2502](#) *Ibid.*, st. I.

[2503](#) *Ibid.*, st. 2, par. 4.

[2504](#) *Ibid.*, st. 2, v. 5.

[2505](#) *Ibid.*, st. 2, V. 6.

[2506](#) *Ibid.*, st. 3, V. I.

[2507](#) Cf. St. Catherine of Siena, *Dialogue* (transl. E. Cartier, Paris, 1855), II, chap. 145.

[2508](#) *The Living Flame*, st. 2, v. 5.

[2509](#) What St. John of the Cross says of the transforming union in *The Living Flame* should be compared with what Tauler wrote about it. Cf. *Sermons de Tauler*: Second sermon for the Fifth Sunday after Trinity Sunday (transl. Hugueny, II, 222–26).

[2510](#) Ps. 33: 15.

[2511](#) Phil. 4: 17.

[2512](#) Ps. 84:9.

[2513](#) Eph.3:17–19.

[2514](#) Cf. II Cor. 12:9.

[2515](#) *Second Sermon for the Fifth Sunday after Trinity* (transl. Hugueny, II, 222 ff.).

[2516](#) *Ibid.*, I, 241 ff.

[2517](#) Rom. 8:26.

[2518](#) Matt. 15:27.

[2519](#) Transl. Hugueny, I, 241 ff.

[2520](#) This is clearly an eminent operating grace, sharply distinct from co-operating grace, as St. Thomas points out (Ia IIae, q. 111, a. 2). Thus is heard and granted the prayer: “Take me from myself, Lord, and give me completely to Thyself.”

[2521](#) Phil. 3:12.

[2522](#) St. 2, v. 5.

[2523](#) St. 36, v. 5.

[2524](#) St. 37, v. I f. This passage and the preceding one are almost the same in the two editions of *A Spiritual Canticle*, although the numbering of the stanzas is not identical. The stanza, numbered thirty-five in one is number thirty-six in the other. We are inclined to believe, as Father Gabriel of St. Magdalen does (*Angelicum*, 1937, fasc. I-2, p. 264), that these two editions of *A Spiritual Canticle* are the work of St. John of the Cross. In the second, the saint denies nothing of what he said in the first, but his thought is more precise; it shows more clearly that the plenitude attained by the transforming union on earth is still only relative, and he compares it more with that of the union of heaven.

On the desire of the transforming union in the soul undergoing the night of the spirit, see *A Spiritual Canticle* (2nd ed.; st. 37, v. 3, par. 5): “The soul longs to enter in earnest into these caverns of Christ, that it may be absorbed, transformed, and inebriated in the love and knowledge of His mysteries, hiding itself in the bosom of the Beloved. It is into these caverns that, in the Canticle of Canticles (2: 13 f.), He invites the bride to enter, saying: ‘Arise, My love, My beautiful one, and come; My dove in the clefts of the rock, in the hollow places of the wall’ These clefts of the rock are the caverns of which we are here speaking, and to which the bride refers, saying: ‘And there we shall enter in.’... To say ‘we shall enter,’ is as much as to say, ‘there shall we transform ourselves,’ that is, ‘I shall be transformed in Thee through the love of Thy divine and sweet judgments.’ “

[2525](#) Cf. the text from *A Spiritual Cantic* quoted at the end of this appendix.

[2526](#) Summa, Ia IIae, q. 111, a.2.

[2527](#) Second edition (1909), st. 38, par. 3 f.

[2528](#) Art. cit., *Angelicum*, 1937, p. 275.

[2529](#) St. 3, par. 89–91.

[2530](#) St. 39, par. 8.

[2531](#) Art. cit., p. 278.

[2532](#) By Father Alexander Rozwadowski, S.J.

[2533](#) We take the word “ascetical” in its ordinary meaning, to characterize acts that can be produced by our personal activity aided by common grace. In these acts the soul is active rather than passive. On the other hand, we use the term “mystical” to characterize acts that cannot be produced by our personal activity aided by common grace, but that require a special inspiration and illumination of the Holy Ghost. In these acts the soul is passive rather than active: *patiens divina*, as St. Thomas says, using the expression of Dionysius. Such are the acts of infused contemplation. This terminology is conformable to the usage common and proper to classical authors.

[2534](#) Cf. Father Gabriel of St. Magdalen, “La Mistica Teresiana,” Vita Cristiana, Florence, 1934. Father Gabriel of St. Magdalen, however, comes far nearer to our way of looking at the matter in a more recent book: *S. Giovanni della Croce, Dottore dell' Amore divino*, Florence, 1936. See also the note at the end of this appendix.

[2535](#) We believe that there is no essential divergence on this point between the teaching of St. Teresa and that of St. John of the Cross. The opinion stated in the text does not seem to us conformable either to the teaching of the great Teresa. The thesis that the doctrine of St. Teresa on the normal character of the mystical life does not differ essentially from that of St. John of the Cross is upheld and solidly proved by Arintero, Garate, Garrigou-Lagrange, Lamballe, Saudreau, and others. Cf. the works of these authors.

[2536](#) Cf. *The Ascent*, II, chaps. 20, 22, 27.

[2537](#) Cf. *The Ascent*, I, chaps. 1–5; II, chaps. 1–8.

[2538](#) Ibid., II, chap. 9; *A Spiritual Cantic*, st. 38.

[2539](#) *A Spiritual Cantic*, st. 15, 17, 18–20, 27, 29, 31, 34, 37–39.

[2540](#) Our demonstration, as is evident, is completely independent of the lively debated question regarding the frontier between asceticism and mysticism. Our proof prescind from this controversy. As our point of departure we take the states of the espousals and of the spiritual marriage; they are not states of transition, they are incontestably at the summit of mysticism.

[2541](#) Cf. st. 13, 15, 18, 19, 27.

[2542](#) Cf. st. 17, 27–29, 34, 36, 37.

[2543](#) Cf. st. 17, 27, 29, 36–38.

[2544](#) *A Spiritual Cantic*, st. 27. 3.

[2545](#) Ibid., 27. 3.

[2546](#) Ibid., 27, 4.

[2547](#) Ibid., st. 22, note.

[2548](#) Cf. st. 13, 34, 38.

[2549](#) Cf. st. 13, 14, 16, 32, 38.

[2550](#) In describing, with St. John of the Cross, the espousals and the spiritual marriage as forms of perfect charity, we shall again have occasion to point out the mystical character of these states.

[2551](#) What we say of the spiritual marriage corresponds also, due proportion being kept, to the spiritual espousals which precede it.

[2552](#) St. Thomas, Ia IIae, q. 184, a. 1, 3.

[2553](#) *A Spiritual Cantic*, st. 14.

[2554](#) St. 24, par. 2, 3.

[2555](#) Ibid., par. 6.

[2556](#) *A Spiritual Canticle*, st. 26, par. 2, 3. It is love that opens the way into each cellar, and the soul advances therein according to its degree of love. St. John of the Cross says: “Many souls reach and enter the first cellar, each according to the perfection of its love, but the last and inmost cellar is entered by few in this world.” The reason for this is that few souls attain on earth the final perfection of love possible in this world. It is not, however, that we are not all called to it, since the perfection of charity is the very goal of our whole life.

[2557](#) Ibid., par. 20, 21.

[2558](#) Cf. st. 15, 17, 18, 27, 34.

[2559](#) Gal. 2: 20.

[2560](#) Cf. I Tim. 1:5. See also St. Thomas, IIa IIae, q. 184, a.1, 3. Pius XI, Encyclical *Rerum omnium perturbationem*, January 16, 1913, and Encyclical *Studiorum ducem*, June 29, 1923.

[2561](#) Cf. st. 32.

[2562](#) Gal. 4:6.

[2563](#) John 17:24.

[2564](#) Cf. II Pet. 1:4.

[2565](#) Cf. st. 19, 38.

[2566](#) St. Thomas, IIa IIae, q. 180, a.1.

[2567](#) Cf. st. 28.

[2568](#) Cf. st. 19, 38.

[2569](#) *The Ascent*, Bk. II, chap. 10.

[2570](#) Ibid., chap. 26.

[2571](#) This teaching of St. John of the Cross on the normal character of the mystical life seems to be also that of St. Augustine, St. Gregory the Great, St. Bernard, St. Albert the Great, St. Bonaventure, and St. Thomas Aquinas.

[2572](#) Bk. II, chaps. 8, 9, 26.

[2573](#) St. 39.

[2574](#) Cf. Summa, Ia IIae, q. III, a. 1, 4, 5.

[2575](#) Summa, IIa IIae, q. 184, a. 3.

[2576](#) “Les Sommets de la vie d’amour,” *Angelicum*, January, 1937, pp. 278–80.

[2577](#) *A Spiritual Canticle*, st. 39, par. 8.

[2578](#) *The Ascent*, Bk. II, passim.

[2579](#) *A Spiritual Canticle*, st. 36, par. 14. We are happy to see that Father Gabriel of St. Magdalen perfectly agrees with us in refusing to admit that there are, as Father Chrysogonus claimed, “two specifically distinct modes” for the gifts of the Holy Ghost, the one ordinary, the other extraordinary. Cf. “Le double mode des dons du Saint-Esprit,” *Etudes carmeJitaines*, October, 1934, pp. 215–32; and supra, Vol. I, pp. 78–88.

[2580](#) Salamanca, pp. 460–86.

[2581](#) *Christian Perfection and Contemplation*, p. 257.

[2582](#) Cf. *The Way of Perfection*, chaps. 18–21.

[2583](#) *Christian Perfection and Contemplation*, p. 259.

[2584](#) *True Devotion to the Blessed Virgin*, chap. 5, art. 5, An easy, short, perfect, safe way; chap. 6, art. I, How Mary forms the predestinate; art. 2, pars. 3–5, She conducts them, defends them, intercedes for them; chap. 7, art. 3, The grace of pure love; art. 5, Communication of the soul and of the spirit of Mary; art. 6, Transformation of souls in Mary in the image of Jesus Christ.

[2585](#) Cf. “L’Union mystique a la Sainte Vierge,” *La Vie spirituelle*, January, 1937, pp. 15–29.

[2586](#) *Les Cahiers de la Vierge* (May, 1936), published, under the title *L’Union mystique a Marie* by Mary of St. Teresa, the text translated from the Flemish by L. Van den Bossche. (Introduction to Marian life. Marian life. The end of Marian life.) Cf. p. 55: “In this life the soul is transformed in Mary through fusion of love”; also, pp. 62–68 fl.

[2587](#) It seems to retain nothing, but it assimilates and transforms the food with which it is nourished in order continually to recall the things of eternity. The writer of this letter has the impression that his memory forgets everything; in reality, it retains what is most important of all, the relation to eternity. It is no longer immersed in time; it dominates it.

[2588](#) We utilize in these last chapters what we wrote on these questions in an earlier book (1923), *Christian Perfection and Contemplation*, pp. 436–57. It is, moreover, a simple summary of what St. John of the Cross says about essentially extraordinary graces. The studies that we have made since 1923 only confirm what we said then on this subject.

[2589](#) This does not mean the theological virtue of faith, since this virtue is common to all Christians. Rather it is a question of a special certitude and security which God grants to those whose duty it is to transmit His divine word to others with a conviction that nothing can shake. This faith, *gratis data*, is given to great preachers and also to theologians. The theologians of Salamanca say (*De fide*, disp. I, dub. IV, no. 113): “Praedicta fides confertur ut in plurimum Doctoribus Ecclesiae circa articulos fidei catholicae.”

[2590](#) Cf. I Cor. 12:4, 7–11. Also Rom. 12:6.

[2591](#) Cf. I Cor. 13:3.

[2592](#) Summa, Ia IIae, q. 111, a.5.

[2593](#) Ibid., a.4.

[2594](#) Bk. II, chaps. 10–31.

[2595](#) Cf. IIa IIae, q. 171–175.

[2596](#) Ibid., q.175.

[2597](#) Cf. Ibid., q. 174, a.1 ad 3um.

[2598](#) Ibid., q. 173, a.1 ad 1um.

[2599](#) Ibid., ad 2um.

[2600](#) Ibid., a. 2.

[2601](#) Ibid., q.174, a.3.

[2602](#) Ibid., a. I ad 3um.

[2603](#) Cf. St. Thomas, *De veritate*, q. 13, a. 3: “Cum totaliter anima intendat ad actum unius potentiae, abstrahitur homo ab actu alterius potentiae.” The mathematician who, like Archimedes, is greatly absorbed in his calculations, no longer hears what is said to him, or no longer sees what is before him. With even greater reason, intense infused contemplation may produce this effect. Cf. IIa IIae, q. 173, a. 3, on partial or total ecstasy. Neither is necessary to prophecy or infused contemplation. Cf. *ibid.*

[2604](#) See IIa IIae, q.175, a.1 and a.2 ad 1um: “Rapture adds something to ecstasy... a certain violence in addition.”

[2605](#) Cf. IIIa, q.10, 11.

[2606](#) *The Ascent of Mount Carmel*, Bk. II, chaps. 1–9.

[2607](#) Ibid., chaps. 10–24.

[2608](#) Ibid., chaps. 25–27.

[2609](#) Ibid., chaps. 28–31.

[2610](#) Ibid., chap. 10.

[2611](#) See IIa IIae, q.171, 173, 174.

2612 *The Ascent of Mount Carmel*, Bk. II, chap. 32.

2613 Cf. Father Gabriel of St. Magdalen, “Visions et revelations chez sainte Therese,” *Etudes carmelitaines*, October, 1938, pp. 190–200. (“Progressive development. Classification. The role of visions in the life of St. Teresa. The security of the visions of St. Teresa. Conclusion.”) The author shows that in *The Interior Castle* (sixth mansion, chap. 2) spiritual locutions are one of the means God uses to “awaken” the soul and prepare it for the spiritual espousals. Later they enlighten the saint on her role as foundress. St. Teresa’s visions continually enlighten her more on the depths of the mysteries of the indwelling of the Blessed Trinity and on the redemptive Incarnation. In St. Teresa’s case, these visions are at first purely intellectual, then occasionally an imaginary “fringe” is added to them. The imagination has a secondary and comparatively minor role in them. Hers is a privileged case, and privileged cases are rare.

2614 Cf. M. J. Congar, O.P., “La credibilite des revelations privees” (*La Vie spirituelle*, October I, 1937, suppl., pp. [29J]-[49J]: “As ecclesiastical authority is an essentially paternal and family authority,- for the Church does not only govern us, it begets us in Christ—it is, in the last analysis, under the influence of filial piety that we adhere, by human faith commanded by obedience, to what the Church tells us about the formal and positive element in some very rare cases of private revelations.”

2615 Cf. Benedict XIV, *De servorum Dei beatificatione*, Bk. III, ch. ult., no. 12. See also C. De Lugo, S.J., *De fide*, disp. I, sect. 11.

2616 Such is the opinion of Cardinal Gotti, O.P., *Theot. schol. dogm.*, I, tract. 9, q. I, dub. 3, par. 2. It should be remarked on this subject that when an attempt was made to obtain a denial of her divine mission from St. Joan of Arc, she replied that she had to believe in it as she believed in the mystery of the redemption; and several times she appealed to the pope, as the supreme judge in these matters.

2617 The Carmelites of Salamanca (*De fide*, disp. I, dub. IV, no. 104, III) quote St. Thomas and his principal interpreters in favor of this opinion. They also point out that a number of these revelations bear on temporal matters (for example, the proximate date of the end of a war), which have not a sufficient bond with the first object of theological faith to be believed on divine faith.

However, several of these theologians admit that adherence to a certain private revelation on the part of the person receiving it, may proceed either from prophetic light or from faith which is mentioned among the graces *gratis datae* (I Cor. 12:4–10).

2618 Benedict XIV, op. cit., II, chap. 32, no. II.

2619 Cf. the decree of Urban VIII, March 13, 1625, which was confirmed by Clement IX, May 23, 1668.

2620 John 21:23.

2621 St. Thomas, IIa IIae, q. 173, a. 4.

2622 John 18: 14.

2623 Cf. Cardinal Bona, *De discretione spirituum*, chap. 20.

2624 *The Interior Castle*, sixth mansion, chap. 3.

2625 *The Ascent of Mount Carmel*, Bk. II, chaps. 19–20.

2626 St. Vincent Ferrer, *Treatise on the Spiritual Life*, chap. 13.

2627 *The Ascent of Mount Carmel*, Bk. II, chap. II.

2628 Ibid.

2629 Ibid., chap. 16.

2630 Ibid., chaps. 16, 17.

2631 Ibid., chaps. 21, 27.

2632 Ibid., chaps. 19, 22. Under the Old Law it was otherwise, for the plenitude of revelation had not yet been given.

2633 For example, to convert them; thus the young Israelite Alphonse Ratisbonne, at the age of twenty and still far from the Catholic Church, received while visiting the church of St. Andrea delle Frate in Rome as a sight-seer a vision of the Blessed Virgin which was the beginning of his conversion.

2634 *The Ascent*, Bk. II, chap. 21.

2635 Ibid., Bk. III, chaps. 9, 12.

2636 Ibid., Bk. II, chap. 22.

2637 Ibid., Bk. II, chap. 29.

- [2638](#) See Ia IIae, q. III, a. 4.
- [2639](#) Cf. I Cor. 13.
- [2640](#) *The Ascent of Mount Carmel*, Bk. II, chap. 25.
- [2641](#) Ibid., chap. 27.
- [2642](#) Ibid.
- [2643](#) Ibid.
- [2644](#) Bk. II, chap. 26.
- [2645](#) St. Thomas, Ia, Q.51, a.2.
- [2646](#) *The Interior Castle*, sixth mansion, chap. 9. Signs of respect should, however, be given only conditionally if the soul thinks that perhaps the devil wishes in this way to make himself adored under the figure of Christ.
- [2647](#) *The Ascent of Mount Carmel*, Bk. II, chap. 16.
- [2648](#) *The Interior Castle*, sixth mansion, chap. 9.
- [2649](#) *Summa*, IIa IIae, q.173, a.3.
- [2650](#) *The Interior Castle*, loco cit.
- [2651](#) St. Thomas, *De veritate*, q.12, a.12.
- [2652](#) St. Teresa, *Life*, chap. 29.
- [2653](#) *The Ascent of Mount Carmel*, Bk. II, chaps. 16, 17; *The Interior Castle*, loco cit.
- [2654](#) *The Ascent of Mount Carmel*, Bk. II, chap. 8.
- [2655](#) *Summa*, IIa IIae, q.173, a.2 ad 2um; *De veritate*, q. 12, a. 12.
- [2656](#) *Life*, chap. 27.
- [2657](#) *The Interior Castle*, sixth mansion, chap. 10; *The Ascent of Mount Carmel*, Bk. II, chaps. 22, 24.
- [2658](#) *The Interior Castle*, loc. cit.
- [2659](#) *The Ascent of Mount Carmel*, Bk. II, chap. 24.
- [2660](#) Ibid.
- [2661](#) *The Ascent of Mount Carmel*, loco cit.
- [2662](#) The Interior Castle, seventh mansion, chap. I.
- [2663](#) Philip of the Blessed Trinity, *Theol. myst. Prooem.*, a.8; Scaramelli, *Dir. myst.*, tr. II, chap. 22, no. 258; Meynard, O.P., *La Vie interieure*, Vol. II, no. 170.
- [2664](#) *A Spiritual Canticle*, st. 22.
- [2665](#) Luke I: 19.
- [2666](#) Ibid., I: 28.
- [2667](#) St. Teresa, *Life*, chap. 25.
- [2668](#) Ibid.
- [2669](#) Ibid.
- [2670](#) Ibid.

[2671](#) Ibid. St. Thomas, Ia, q.III, a.I, 3; q.114; Ia IIae, q.80, a.1–3.

[2672](#) Cf. St. Thomas, Ia, q. 107, a. I; also Cajetan’s commentary.

[2673](#) St. Teresa, *Life*, chap. 27.

[2674](#) *The Ascent of Mount Carmel*, Bk. II, chaps. 18–31.

[2675](#) Ibid., chap. 29.

[2676](#) Ibid.

[2677](#) Ibid.

[2678](#) Ibid.

[2679](#) Ibid., chap. 30.

[2680](#) Dan. 9: 22.

[2681](#) Exod. 3:11.

[2682](#) *The Ascent of Mount Carmel*, Bk. II, chap. 30.

[2683](#) f. St. Thomas, Ia, q. III, a.I, 3; q.114, a.I-4; Ia IIae, q.80, a.I-3; cf. Cardinal Bona, *De discretione spirituum*, chap. 17.

[2684](#) *The Ascent of Mount Carmel*, loco cit.

[2685](#) Gen. 17: 1.

[2686](#) *The Ascent of Mount Carmel*, Bk. II, chap. 31.

[2687](#) *The Living Flame of Love*, st. I, I.

[2688](#) *The Ascent of Mount Carmel*, Bk. II, chap. 32.

[2689](#) Ibid.

[2690](#) Ibid.

[2691](#) Cf. St. Thomas, Ia, q.8, a. 1–3; q.43, a.3; q. 104, a. 1, 2; q. 105, a.3, 4.

[2692](#) St. Thomas, Ia IIae, q. 110, a. 3, 4.

[2693](#) Ibid., q.9, a.4; q.10, a. 1, 2, 4.

[2694](#) Ibid., q.II3,a.8, and *De veritate*, q.28, a.3.

[2695](#) *Institutio spiritualis*, chap. 12.

[2696](#) Summa, Ia IIae, q.10, a.2.

[2697](#) *The Ascent of Mount Carmel*, Bk. II, chap. 32. Vallgornera, *Theol. myst. D. Thomae*, q.3, disp. 5, a.9, nos. 1, 3, 4.

[2698](#) Cf. St. Thomas, Ia, q.54, a.I: “Whether an angel’s act of understanding is his substance.” Cf. ibid., a.2, 3; q.77, a.I, 2.

[2699](#) *The Ascent of Mount Carmel*, Bk. II, chap. 32; *The Dark Night*, Bk. II, chap. 23; *The Living Flame*, st. 2, v. 3.

[2700](#) The depths of the soul is also occasionally called the summit of the spirit, when one considers sensible things, not only as exterior to the soul, but as very inferior to it.

[2701](#) In *The Ascent of Mount Carmel* (Bk. II, chap. 26), St. John of the Cross says of “touches which are so strong and so profound that they penetrate into the inmost substance of the soul”: “These touches savor of eternal life.... In regard to the other perceptions, we said that the soul should abstract itself from them, but this duty ceases before these, since they are the manifestations of that union to which we are trying to conduct the soul. All that we have taught previously on the subject of despoliation and of complete detachment was directed toward this union.”

[2702](#) This number of the *Etudes* contains the reports which were read and discussed during the conferences held on April 17–19, 1936, in the monastery of the Carmelites of Avon-Fontainebleau.

2703 *Etudes carmelitaines* (October, 1936), p. 71.

2704 Ibid., p. 90.

2705 Ibid., p. 158.

2706 “A propos d’un congrès sur la stigmatisation,” *Messenger du Sacre-Coeur* (May, 1937), pp. 18–96.

2707 *Etudes carmelitaines*, p. 191.

2708 On the contrary, the smallest natural lesion on another part of the body brings suppuration, even in stigmatics. It should also be observed that the stigmata sometimes last for thirty and forty years.

2709 Or again on Friday.

2710 DArt. cit., pp. 291 ff.

2711 See the case of St. Gemma Galgani and that of St. Veronica Giuliani, studied in the *Etudes carmelitaines* (October, 1936), pp. 196–204. See also Estrade, *Vie de Soeur Marie de Jesus-Crucifie* (2nd ed., Paris, 1916), pp. 3642. For a more detailed account see La Vie merveilleuse de Soeur Marie de Jesus-Crucifie (3 vols., Carmel of Pau), p. 6. The former mistress of novices who assisted her during the sufferings of the stigmatization gives the following striking testimony: “Her hands were bathed in blood. I examined them carefully to see where it was coming from, but there was no trace of wounds or of a scratch. I then took a compress to bathe her forehead and, while doing so, I said interiorly: ‘I beg Thee, O Lord, make me see where this blood is coming from, so that I can render testimony of this child.’ And at the very instant there formed under my hands, a little above the right eyebrow, a hole which seemed to be made by a large thorn. From this hole gushed forth waves of blood. I continued to soak up the blood with a compress, but I noticed that the edges of this hole did not yield like those of an ordinary wound, and then it suddenly closed, or rather disappeared, leaving the skin smooth, without the slightest sign of a lesion.... Only the omnipotence of God could in a few moments wound and heal without leaving the slightest trace.” On the preceding page, we read that “her feet also bled. The ampulla disappeared and a hole formed which pierced through to the other side of the foot.” It then healed suddenly.

2712 Cf. St. Thomas, Ia IIae, q. 7, a.3.

2713 The Interior Castle, sixth mansion, chap. 11

2714 The Living Flame, st. 2, V. 2.

2715 The Interior Castle, sixth mansion, chap. 11.

2716 Ibid. On the wound of love, see also St. John of the Cross, The Living Flame, st. 2, v. I, and Father Gabriel of St. Magdalen, C.D., “L’Ecole theresienne et les blessures d’amour mystique,” *Etudes carmelitaines*, October, 1936, p. 208.

2717 Bk. VI, chap. 15.

2718 *De servorum Dei beatificatione*, Bk. IV, part I, chap. 33, nos. 13, 19.

2719 Loc. cit.

2720 Art. cit., p. 294. Moreover, these rays appeared in either an imaginary or a corporeal vision, and they manifest the divine action which produces these corporeal wounds. On the comparison of these facts with morbid phenomena and diabolical manifestations, see *infra* chaps. 57, 58.

2721 Part II, chap. 6.

2722 Everybody knows the promises made by Pierre Janet’s patient, Madeleine, that she would be lifted into the air like the Blessed Virgin on the feast of the Assumption; she never rose at all. Dr. P. Janet discusses this case at length in his work: *De l’angoisse d’extase* (Paris, 1926), “Sentiment de levitation,” I, 98, 146 f.

Levitation has never been proved at the Salpetriere.

2723 *De beatificatione*, Bk. III, chap. 49.

2724 Op. cit., Bk. IV, part I, chap. 26, nos. 8–30.

2725 On this subject, see Ribet, *La Mystique*, Part II, chap. 19.

2726 Cf. Benedict XIV, op. cit., Bk. IV, part I, chap. 31, nos. 19–28.

2727 Op. cit., Bk. IV, part I, chap. 27.

2728 On stigmatization, see the article “Stigmates de saint Francois,” *Dictionnaire apologetique de la foi catholique*, and the principal lives of St. Francis of Assisi and of St. Catherine of Siena; cf. also the Bollandists. See also O. Leroy, *La Levitation* (Paris, 1932); “La splendeur corporelle des saints,” *La Vie spirituelle*, supplement,

October, December, 1935, January, 1936; “La multiplication miraculeuse des biens,” *ibid.*, August, 1937, April, 1938.

²⁷²⁹ On this subject, see the studies of Dr. Pierre Janet, *L'Automatisme psychologique* (10th ed., 1930), Part II, chaps. 3 f.; *De l'angoisse a l'extase*, 1926; *La Medecine psychologique*, 1928. Cf. also Dr. E. Regis, *Precis de psychiatrie*, (6th ed., 1926), in particular on hysteria, pp. 954–66. Robert de Sinety, S.J., *Psychopathologie et direction*, 1934. A. Poulain, S.J., *Des Graces d'oraison* (10th ed., 1922), Part III, chap. 18; Part IV, chap. 21. Msgr. A. Saudreau, *L'Etat mystique, sa nature et ses phases* (2nd ed., 192 I), chap. 17. G. Rabeau, “Theologie mystique et psychiatrie,” *La Vie spirituelle* (suppl.), June 1935; and in the same issue an article by Dr. H. Ey, “La notion de psychopathologie dans ses rapports avec les problemes mystiques.” J. de Tonquedec, S.J., “Anormaux” (sanctification des), *Dict. de spiritualite*, I, col. 678–89. Dr. Biot, “Les maladies nerveuses et mentales,” *Ami du clerge* (1939), no. I, pp. 17–27.

²⁷³⁰ *Op. cit.*, p. 955.

²⁷³¹ Cf. P. Janet, *L'Automatisme psychologique*, Part II, chaps. 3 f.

²⁷³² *Op. cit.*, p. 960.

²⁷³³ Chaps. 18, 20.

²⁷³⁴ *Psychologie des mystiques* (1910), pp. 20f.

²⁷³⁵ Cf. H. Bergson, *Les Deux sources de la morale et de la religion* (1932), pp. 228, 235, 256.

²⁷³⁶ Estrade, *Vie de Soeur Marie de Jesus-Crucifie, carmelite arabe* (2nd ed., 1816), p. 18.

²⁷³⁷ Buzy, *Vie de Soeur Marie de Jesus-Crucifie, carmelite arabe* (1927, pp. 29 ff.

²⁷³⁸ *L'Ami du clerge* (1914), p. 82.

²⁷³⁹ Cf. “Aveugles,” *Dict. de la Bible*, col. 1289.

²⁷⁴⁰ It should also be pointed out, as Dr. Regis observes (*op. cit.*, pp. 697–99: “Psychopathic states resulting from hyperfunction of the thyroid”), that diseases like Basedow’s have symptoms which recall those of hysteria; but “when psychic disturbances arise through crises corresponding to Basedowian pressures, the diagnosis cannot be doubtful” (*ibid.*).

In the same work (pp. 700 ff.) cf. the article on endocrinian autointoxications.

²⁷⁴¹ Cf. *Etudes carmelitaines* (October, 1938), pp. 188 if., 235–39.

²⁷⁴² “Quelques notions elementaires sur les maladies nerveuses et mentales,” *L'Ami du clerge* (1939), pp. 17–27. After having distinguished the organic maladies of the nervous system from nervous diseases, he divides the latter into neuroses, psychoneuroses, and psychoses.

Neuroses which attack the nervous system from the functional point of view are epilepsy, Basedow’s disease, and the diseases of the endocrine glands, neurasthenia, one of the symptoms of which is asthenia, a notable loss of strength.

Psychoneuroses include hyperemotivity, with its manifestations: anxiety; psychasthenia, which is manifested by obsession, scruples; the mythomania of false ecstasies, false visionaries, false stigmatics.

Psychoses, which peculiarly affect mental activity, have diverse forms: melancholia, mania, cyclothymia (manias or melancholy returning in cycles), hallucinations, delirium, which show the disintegration of the personality, whereas unity through the subordination and coordination of ideas, feelings, and voluntary acts, is the sign of mental health.

²⁷⁴³ Cf. Ribet, *Mystique divine*, Vol. III, chap. 10; A. Poulain, S.J., *Des Graces d'oraison* (10th ed.), chap. 24, 7–8, 59–89; A. Saudreau, *L'Etat mystique* (2nd ed., 1911), chaps. 22 f; “Possession,” *Dictionnaire apologetique*, also *Dict. theol. cath.*; J. de Tonquedec, S.J., *Les Maladies nerveuses ou mentales et les manifestations diaboliques* (Paris, 1938).

²⁷⁴⁴ *Summa*, Ia, q. 105, a.4; Ia IIae, q. 109, a.6.

²⁷⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, Ia IIae, q. 80, “Of the cause of sin, as regards the devil”; Ia. q. 114, “Of the assaults of the demons.”

²⁷⁴⁶ Cf. A. Poulain, S.J., *op. cit.* chap. 24, no. 94.

²⁷⁴⁷ A. Monnin, *Le Cure d'Ars*, Bk. III, chap. II.

²⁷⁴⁸ “Blessed Margaret of Cortona,” *Bollandists* (February, 22), VI, p.370, no. 178.

²⁷⁴⁹ A. Poulain, S.J., *loco cit.*

²⁷⁵⁰ *Direttorio mistico*, tr. V, chap. 7. no. 76.

²⁷⁵¹ Cf. *supra*, chap. 5: “Conduct to be observed in the night of the senses”; Part IV, chap. 38: “Conduct to be observed in the passive purification of the spirit. “

[2752](#) Letter to Father d'Attichy (1635); d. *Lettres spirituelles* du P. JeanJoseph Surin (Toulouse, 1926), I, 126 ff.

[2753](#) G. Cordara, S.J., *Vita della B. Eustochio*, Rome, 1769.

[2754](#) E. Georges, Eudist, *Saint Jean Eudes* (Paris, 1936), pp. 278–315. We read (ibid., p. 291) that Marie des Valleees said to the devil: “Is that all you can do? You are not very strong.... Be careful not to omit the least of the afflictions that God permits you to make me endure.... But take great care what you do. You are a lion, and I am only a miserable ant. Should the lion overcome the ant, people would make fun of him for having armed himself to fight so weak and wretched a beast. But if the ant overcomes the lion, as it undoubtedly will, because it is fortified by the grace of God, confusion will be the eternal share of the lion. Are you not, therefore, very foolish to do what you do? Shame, shame on the beast with the ten horns” (*Manuscrit de Quebec*, Bk. I, chap. 4).

[2755](#) Estrade, *Vie de Soeur Marie de Jesus-Crucifie* (2nd ed.; Paris, 1916), pp. 85–147, 230–56.

[2756](#) We know a case of this kind, which we learned of through a written account sent us more than thirty years ago by one of our Dominican friends, who was at that time professor of dogma in the seminary of Mosul.

[2757](#) Cf. Richer, *Etudes cliniques sur la grande hysterie*.

[2758](#) St. Teresa, *Life*, chap. 31.

[2759](#) Cf. Estrade, *Vie* (2nd ed.), pp. 231 ff., 249–55.

[2760](#) Ibid., pp. 106–24.

[2761](#) Ibid., pp. 106–24, 230–56.

[2762](#) *The Dark Night of the Soul*, Bk. II, chap. 23.

[2763](#) Summa, IIIa, q.89, a.2. Cf. J. N. Grou, S.J., *Maximes spirituelles* (ed. 1915), 22nd maxim, p. 238: “To ‘bring certain interior souls to the sense of their total powerlessness and perfect dependence on grace..., God humbles them by the sins into which He permits them to fall, especially when He sees that they count on themselves.... Just so a mother lets her child take falls which are not dangerous, that it may recognize its need of her and learn not to leave her.”

[2764](#) Cf. I Cor. 1:27f.

[2765](#) Col. 2:643.

[2766](#) Jesus-Christ, II, 349–54.

[2767](#) *In Ium Sent.*, Dist. VIII, p. II, q. I, art. unic.

[2768](#) Capecelatro, *La vita di S. Filippo Neri* (Rome, 1901), I, 423.

[2769](#) *Bulletin Thomiste* (July-December, 1936), p. 78, apropos of the book by Father Lemonnyer, O.P., *Notre Vie divine*, ed. du Cerf, 1936.

[2770](#) Cf. *De revelatione* (1st ed., 1918), I, 430–515. “*La Surnaturalite de la foi*,” *Revue Thomiste*, January, 1914. *Le Sens du mystere* (1934), 234–87.

[2771](#) *Christian Perfection and Contemplation*, pp. 54–80; 115–46 (“The Life of grace or the beginning of eternal life”). *L’Amour de Dieu et la croix de Jesus*: II, 575–635: “*La purification passive de la foi, de l’esperance, et de la charite.*”

[2772](#) *Christian Perfection and Contemplation*, pp. 208–17.

[2773](#) This article is to be found also in *Christian Perfection and Contemplation*, pp. 27 f.

[2774](#) Cf. St. Thomas, IIa IIae, q.181, a. I: “The active and the contemplative life differ according to the different occupations of men intent on different ends: one of these occupations is the consideration of the truth; and this is the end of the contemplative life, while the other is external work to which the active life is directed.... Hence it is clear that the moral virtues belong essentially to the active life.” Ad Ium: “The chief of the moral virtue is justice.” Ad 3um: “It may also be replied that the active life is a disposition to the contemplative life.”

Ibid., a.2: “The knowledge of prudence, which is of itself directed to the works of the moral virtues, belongs directly to the active life.”

[2775](#) Ibid., q. 181, a. 3: “Hence the work of the active life conduces to the contemplative, by quelling the interior passions which give rise to the fantasms whereby contemplation is hindered.”

[2776](#) Ibid., a.4: “The contemplative life, with regard to its nature, precedes the active, inasmuch as it applies itself to things which precede and are better than others; wherefore it moves and directs the active life.”

Cf. ibid., ad 2um, 3um; q.188, a.6: “From the fullness of contemplation proceed teaching and preaching.”

[2777](#) *The Dark Night*, Bk. I, chap. 14: “The soul began to set out on the way of the spirit, the way of proficients, which is also called the illuminative way or the way of infused contemplation, wherein God Himself teaches and refreshes the soul without meditation or any active efforts that itself may deliberately make.”

[2778](#) *Christian Perfection and Contemplation*, pp. 208–17.

[2779](#) Cf. *Notre Vie divine*, pp. 125–52. In the opinion of Father Lemonnier, meditation is moral prayer, the exercise of the practical reason, in which the infused virtue of prudence leads the soul by “elections” to a resolution. Here the influence of the theological virtues is felt only from above and through the intermediary of the moral virtues, the virtue of religion included. Theological prayer, often called affective prayer, is the proper exercise of the virtues of faith, hope, and charity, which have for their object God Himself, with whom the soul enters into intimate conversation for a closer union with Him, and not for practical results that are, so to speak, exterior. Lastly, mystical prayer, the fruit of the gifts of the Holy Ghost, depends on His initiatives and procures for us a sweet experience of divine things.

[2780](#) St. John of the Cross, *The Dark Night*, Bk. I, chap. 9.

[2781](#) Father Gabriel of St. Magdalen, CD., *S. Giovanni della Croce, Dottore dell’amore divino* (1937), pp. 165 f.: “There is no question here of a completely active contemplation, nor of a perfectly passive contemplation: a delicate divine infusion meets a most simple activity of the soul. But this divine infusion does not fall under the experience of the soul, whereas the latter may perceive its own activity.”

[2782](#) St. Teresa describes it in *The Way of Perfection*, chap. 28. It is a simplified acquired prayer, whereas passive prayer begins with the fourth mansion.

[2783](#) *Christian Perfection and Contemplation*, pp. 324 ff.; *Les trois conversions et les trois voies*, pp. 124–38; 151–60. Cf. *supra*, chaps. 28, 31, 32.

[2784](#) Cf. *Ila Ilae*, q.45, a.3.

[2785](#) Cf. *Ia*, q.20, a. 3, 4.

[2786](#) Cf. *I Cor.* 4: 7.

[2787](#) In this case there are three infused habits specifically distinct by reason of their formal object, although these gifts bear on the mysteries of faith. Faith itself adheres to these mysteries owing to the authority of God revealing. The gift of understanding makes us penetrate them under a special illumination, which is the immediate rule or the formal motive of this act of penetration as such (*Ila Ilae*, q. 8, a. 1, 2, 3,6). The gift of wisdom makes us taste them under another special inspiration which utilizes the connaturalness with divine things based on charity (*ibid.*, q.45, a. 2), and which makes us attain them, “non proprie ut revelata, sed ut fruibilia.” Cf. *Ia*, q. 43, a. 3.

[2788](#) We developed this idea in a series of articles on the theological virtues, and in another on these same virtues according to St. Catherine of Siena. Cf. *La Vie spirituelle*, May, June, December, 1935; January, April, October, 1936. Cf. *supra*, chaps. 7–21.

[2789](#) On this subject, cf. *L’Amour de Dieu et La croix de Jesus*, II, 575–632. Cf. *supra*, chaps. 39–41.

[2790](#) Cf. Philip of the Blessed Trinity, *Summa theologiae mysticae* (ed. Brussels, 1874), III, 132–274: “De exercitio virtutum theologiarum et moralium (in statu heroico).” Cf. *supra*, chaps. 42–47.

[2791](#) *Summa*, *Ila Ilae*, q. 180, a.6.

[2792](#) *Ibid.*, q.166: “Of studiousness”; q. 167: “Of curiosity.”

[2793](#) Cf. *Christian Perfection and Contemplation* (pp. 330 f.): “Infused contemplation is an act which proceeds, in so far as its substance is concerned, from living faith, and with respect to its superhuman mode, from the gift of wisdom or of understanding” (Cajetan and Joseph of the Holy Ghost). We do not conceive of an act of these gifts which would not proceed radically from faith; here there is subordination of the habitus and of their formal objects. The fact remains that the theological virtues are superior to the gifts, although they receive from the latter an additional perfection, for example, of penetration. Thus the tree is more perfect than its fruits, but with them it is more perfect than without them. Cf. *supra*, chap. 31.

[2794](#) Cf. *Notre Vie divine*, p. 346.

[2795](#) Cf. *Ila Ilae*, q.45, a.2; a.4 ad 2um: “This argument considers, not the wisdom of which we speak but that which is acquired by the study and research of reason, and is compatible with mortal sin.” *Ibid.*, c.: “The wisdom of which we are speaking cannot be together with mortal sin.”

[2796](#) Sess. III, chap. 4 (Denzinger, 1796).

[2797](#) *Summa*, *Ila Ilae*, q. 188, a.6.

[2798](#) What might, without our willing it, lessen the supernaturalness of the infused virtues, including that of the theological virtues, would be to define our supernatural life, as has been done, not as the participation in the intimate life of God, but the incarnation of the divine life in us. First of all, in this case “incarnation” is a metaphorical expression to which must be preferred preciseness of terms when possible. Moreover, “incarnation” designates the union of two natures, and more precisely the relation of dependence and appurtenance of the less elevated in regard to the person who possesses the higher of these two natures. To define the supernatural life by the incarnation in us of the divine life tends to make our own nature enter into the definition of the supernatural life, as the human nature of Christ is part of Him. Without wishing to do so, one would thus revert, because of lack of precision of terms, to the conception which denies the essential supernaturalness of the infused virtues. Their supernaturalness would be reduced to a mode superadded to our natural activity; now this mode is already superadded to the acquired moral virtues, governed by charity, and the acts of which are meritorious.

What we have just said in this chapter may be confirmed by reading in the *Catechisme* composed by John of St. Thomas and translated into Latin under the title *Compendium totius doctrinae christianae* (Venice, 1693, pp. 205 ff.), the chapter on “Meditation and Contemplation,” and the necessity of a profound interior life for every religious.

[2799](#) Vol. I, chap. I, pp. 29 f.

[2800](#) Cf. Ia, q. 12, a. 1–13.

[2801](#) Matt. 5: 12.

[2802](#) John 4: 13 f.

[2803](#) John 17: 3.

[2804](#) Cf. I Cor. 13: 12.

[2805](#) Cf. I John 3:2.

[2806](#) Denzinger, nos. 530, 693.

[2807](#) Cf. IIa, q. 12, a.2.

[2808](#) Rom. 8:29.

[2809](#) St. Thomas, IIIa, q. 3, a.5 ad 2um.

[2810](#) Matt. 25:23.

[2811](#) Ia IIae, q. III, a.5.

[2812](#) In *The Dark Night of the Soul* (Bk. II, chap. 20), St. John of the Cross says: “‘Love works in such souls—they are few, and perfectly purified in this life—that which purgatory works in others in the next.’”

[2813](#) Cf. Ia IIae, q.69; *In Matt.* 5:3–13.

[2814](#) Cf. Ia IIae, q.61, a.5.

[2815](#) Cf. IIa IIae, q.161, a.6 ad 3um: “The appetite may even go as far as lovingly to embrace external abasement.”

[2816](#) Cf. IIIa, q.46, a.4: “It was most fitting that Christ should suffer the death of the cross, first of all, as an example of virtue. For Augustine thus writes:... In order, then, that no kind of death should trouble an upright man.”

[2817](#) *Comm. in Ep. ad Hebraeos*, 10: 1–40, “per totum.”

[2818](#) Ibid.; also IIa IIae, q. 27; q.184, a. 3; *Commn. in lib. Job*, chaps. 1,7,21: “On the patience of the just in great tribulations.”

[2819](#) *Treatise on the Love of God*, Bk. VI, chaps. 3–15; Bk. IX, chaps. 12–15.

[2820](#) See II Cor. 4: 17.

[2821](#) Ibid., 5:5.

[2822](#) John 7:37f.

[2823](#) John 14:21.

[2824](#) Matt. 5:8–10.

[2825](#) Summa, Ia IIae, q.69, a.2: “The hope of future happiness may be in us for two reasons: first, by reason of our having a preparation for, or a disposition to, future happiness; and this is by way of merit; secondly, by a kind of imperfect inchoation of future happiness in holy men, even in this life. For it is one thing to hope that the tree will bear fruit, when the leaves begin to appear, and another, when we see the first signs of the fruit.”

[2826](#) In the works of great spiritual writers, there are eminent parts which are theologically established; they alone belong to spiritual theology *in statu scientiae*. Other parts belong only to the art of direction, which must not be confounded with the prudence of the director. This prudence makes use of this art when the director has sufficient knowledge of it; the gift of counsel and certain graces of state may also supply for the knowledge of this art when the director has not gone deeply enough into it.

[2827](#) Thus many Thomists say, in a higher domain: predestination is an objective part of Providence, and it attains what is most elevated in the object of Providence.

[2828](#) Cf. St. Thomas, Ia, q. 1, a. 3.

[2829](#) Sess. III, chap. 4.

